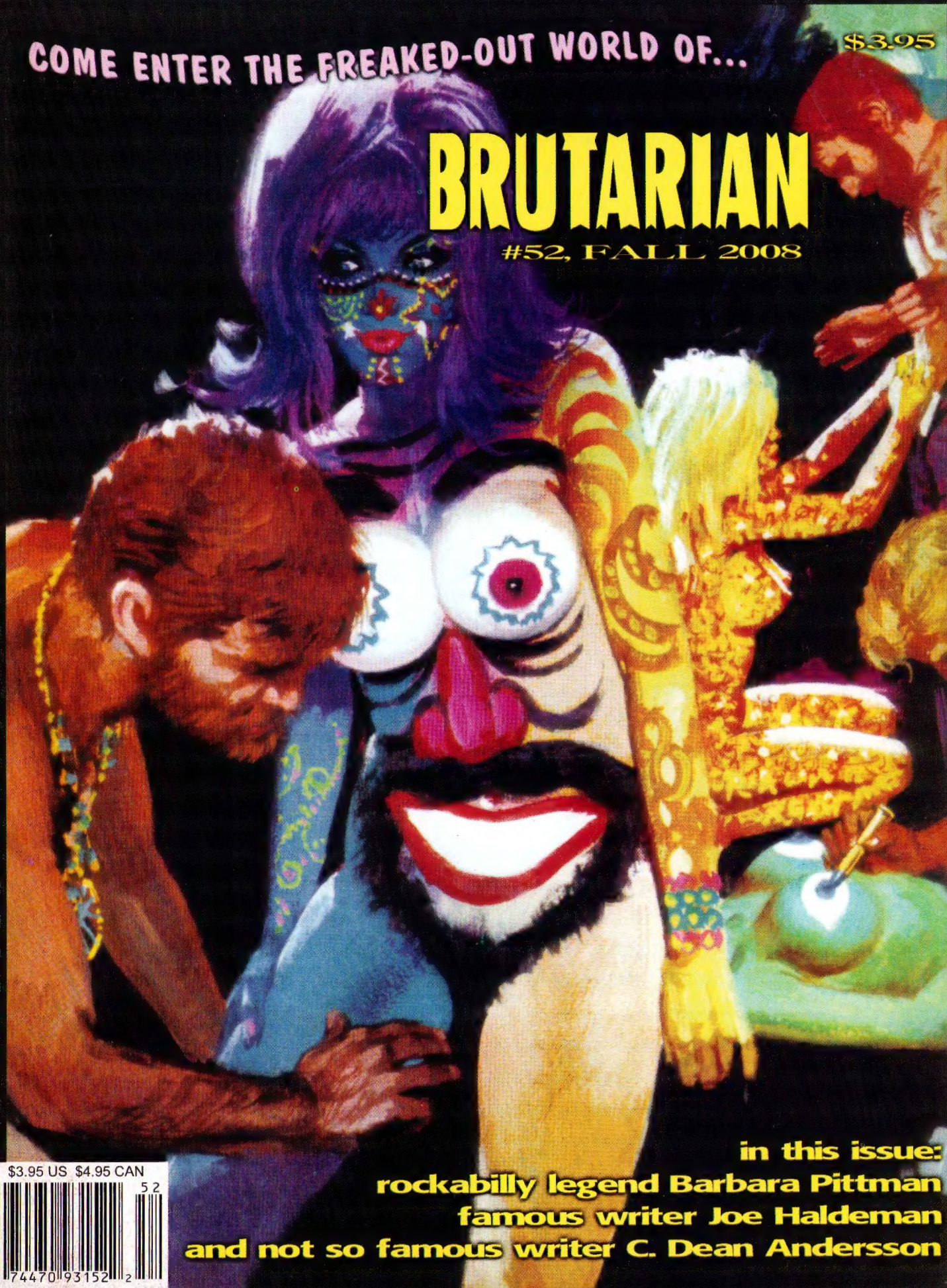


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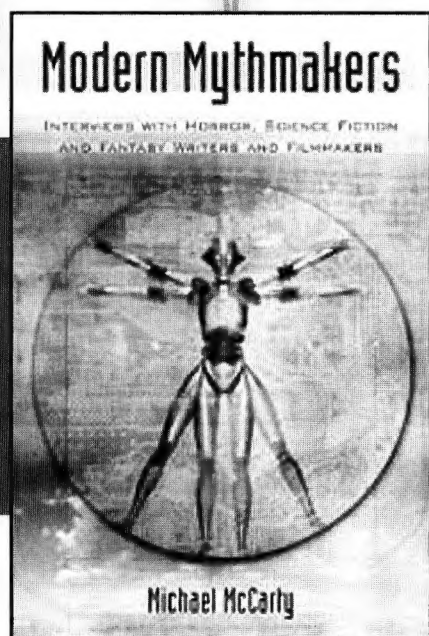
in this issue:
rockabilly legend Barbara Pittman
famous writer Joe Haldeman
and not so famous writer C. Dean Andersson

Visit The Two Worlds of Michael McCarty

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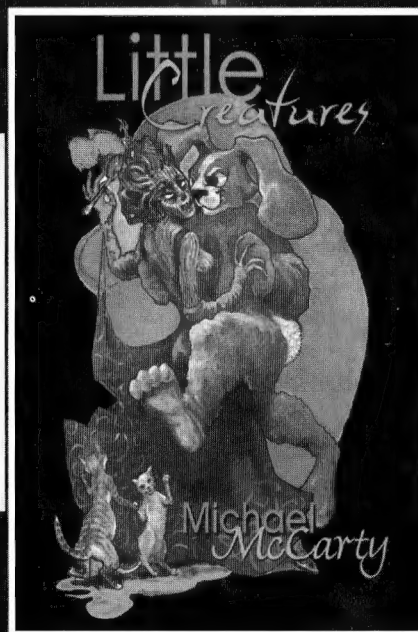
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by Michael McCarty, Bram Stoker Award Finalist

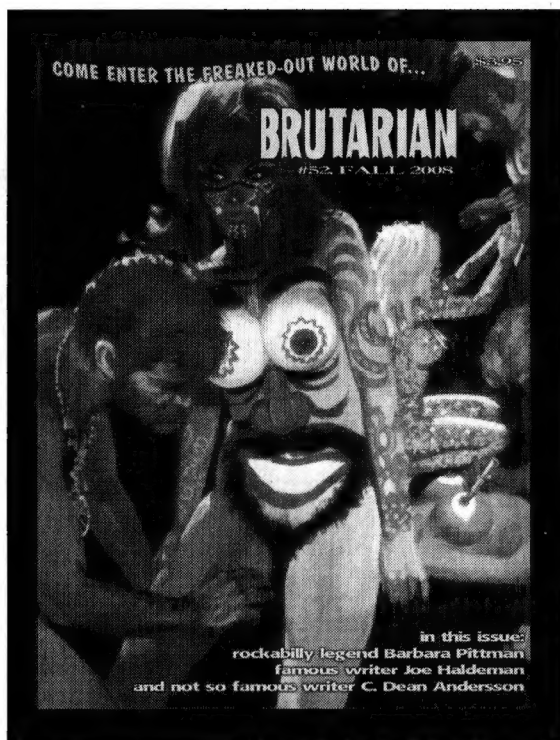
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Cover design by Brian Horowitz

BRUTARIAN NO. 52

Fall 2008

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Dom Salemi at 9405 Ulysses Court,
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Takin' IN The Trash!

~ by Brian D. Horowitz

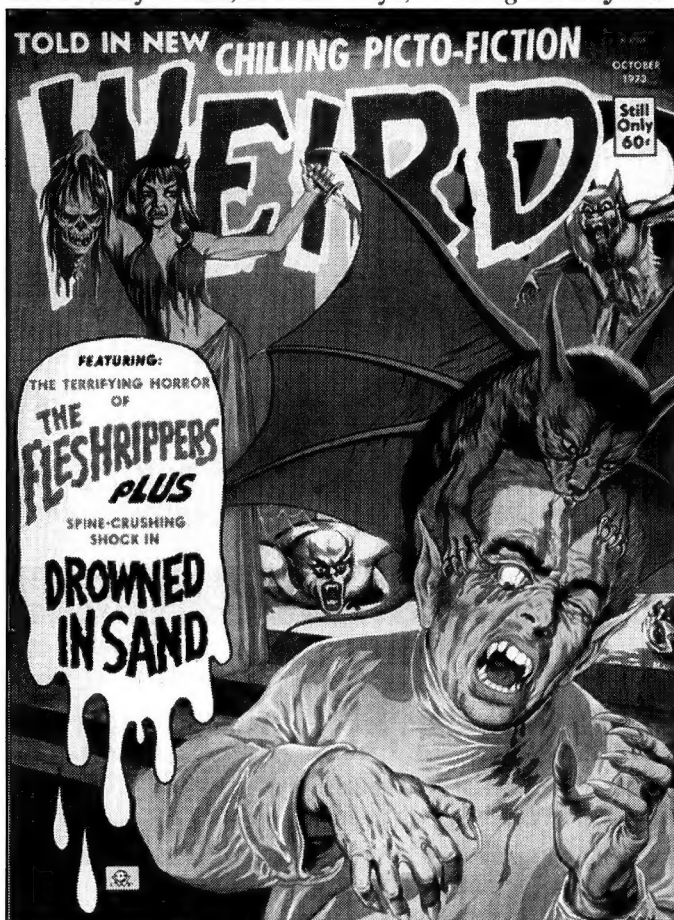


THE WEIRD COMIC BOOK THAT DESTROYED MY MIND!

One glorious day in the early 1970s, my mom took me to a movie theater in a suburban strip shopping center in Laurel, Maryland to see the bleak sci-fi flick **Soylent Green**. I was no older than ten years old. If it was the original release of the movie then I would have to have been eight years old, but I can't remember for sure. What I *do* remember is that film pretty much blew my mind. (Little did I realize that by the time I was forty, this country would, in some ways, be *living out Soylent*

Green! But I digest...) After the movie my mother and I walked across the way and went into a bookstore. Once inside, first thing I really noticed was several horror movie books, including Dennis Gifford's infamous **A Pictorial History of Horror Movies**, a book which a lot of you probably own, especially if you are over forty. I then noticed what appeared to be a large stack of innocent-looking magazines. But as I walked over and the top cover came into view, what I saw was *not* so innocent! What lay before me was the most colorful, lurid and bloody thing I could have ever - and had NEVER - imagined!

As I picked up the top magazine and gazed upon its gruesomeness, I fell into a stunned silence, a sort of cross between shock and orgasm (at least as far as an eight-year-old is concerned). What the hell *were* these things? I lifted the top magazine off of the pile and then noticed that the magazine underneath was a *different* issue, indeed an entirely different title altogether, but with that same style of grizzly cover art! As I picked up the second magazine and noticed yet a *third* similar styled one underneath, I suddenly realized that the entire stack of fifty or sixty mags were all *different* issues! What a discovery! A huge heaping pile of beasts, blood and babes! "M-m-m-mom..." I muttered. My mother approached. "PLEASE!! OH, PLEASE!! Can I PLEASE have one? PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE!" I cried out in my best James Brown impersonation. "For the love of GOD, woman! PLEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEASE!!!" My mother picked up one of the magazines and looked at it. And in that moment, a split-second combination of love and dysfunction, a decision was made that would indeed change my life, point me towards the path of sleaze and perversion, and cause Dr. Frederick Wertham one more roll in his Godforsaken grave (look it up), she muttered



the words which I so longed to hear: "Okay, Brian, you can pick out one."

"Oh, YEEEEES!! Oh, *THANK YOU!!*" I cried, "THAAAAANK YOOOOOU!!" I spent the next ten minutes going through the entire stack several times, carefully studying each cover like they were some kind of unearthed ancient artifacts from a lost tribe, rare treasures dug up from the tomb of Tut, some kinds of face-stained shrouds of some exploited deity... Yes, I had discovered that, indeed, there *WAS* a God and I had the proof in my own little mits, baby! I took my time since I could, after all, only choose one. And I had to make sure it was *THE* one! And after studying each cover very, very closely, I decided on...



Yes, that was the fateful day I had discovered the "picto-fiction" world of the mysterious Eerie Publications, some of the shittiest horror comics ever drawn with some of the goriest and most outrageous covers ever painted! Over the following years, I'd occasionally but rarely stumble on a few issues here and there, and each time it was like uncovering a wonderful golden turd! With titles like **Weird Vampire Tales**, **Tales of Voodoo**, **Terror Tales**, **Tales from the Tomb**, **Witches Tales**,... you get the idea. It wasn't until a road trip to New

York City circa 1984 that led me to a small comic book store in The Village where I was able to score about one hundred of these things for only around one dollar to two dollars each! A motherload of monsters!! How lucky I felt to find so many at one time and in one place, too! But how could this possibly happen? Why weren't these already snapped up? You see, truth is, back then no one really cared about trash like this. These weren't considered "collectible" comics. These were disposable horrors, the McDonald's of comic books, meant to be consumed quickly and then shat into the toilet of terror turds, flushed away to the sea of unwanted comics along with Archie, Big Boy, and all the other non-collectibles. Indeed these were third-rate imitations of classier (I say "classier," not necessarily "classy" mind you) comic mags like Warren Publications' **Creepy**, **Eerie** and **Vampirella**, and Skywald's **Nightmare**, **Psycho** and **Scream**. All decent rags in their own right. And yet, there was something about these others, these monster mavericks... they were trashier imitations of the trash they tried to copy... like they were saying, "Fuck it! We know we're garbage, so let's just crank the shit up!" Having so many at this point I then discovered that the mags were pretty much interchangeable, that the stories were continuously reprinted from issue to issue regardless of the title. In fact some of these stories were already reprinted from 1950s pre-code comic books. Occasionally some of the art would even be touched-up to appear gorier than how it was originally published earlier! And the violence could be outrageous on a surreal level. Many times in these stories, for example, someone would get a knife in the neck or an axe in the back and that would cause their eyeball to fly out! Bet you didn't know *that* could happen, did you doc? The art itself was usually pretty poor, but a few of them, especially around the late '60s / early '70s, did have their own cool style, but those were few and far between. One memorable tale, "Blood Bath" (seen below), told of the



HE SPUN DIZZILY...FEELING FAINT HE FELL TO THE FLOOR WITH THE STENCH OF DEATH IN HIS NOSTRILS...SLOWLY LIFE WAS FEBBING FROM HIS SPASMODIC,ERRING BODY...



...WHITHIN SECONDS THE FINAL, THICK VEIL OF BLACKNESS ENVELOPED HIS WHOLE BEING AS HE ENTERED OBUVION...



MOMENTS LATER COMPLAINTS FROM NEIGHBORS BROUGHT THE POLICE TO THIS GROTESQUE,SPINE-CHILLING SCENE...

GREAT CEASERS GHOST,WHAT IN THE WORLD HAPPENED HERE...IS LIKE A HUMAN BUTCHER SHOP...



The End

horrors of LSD.

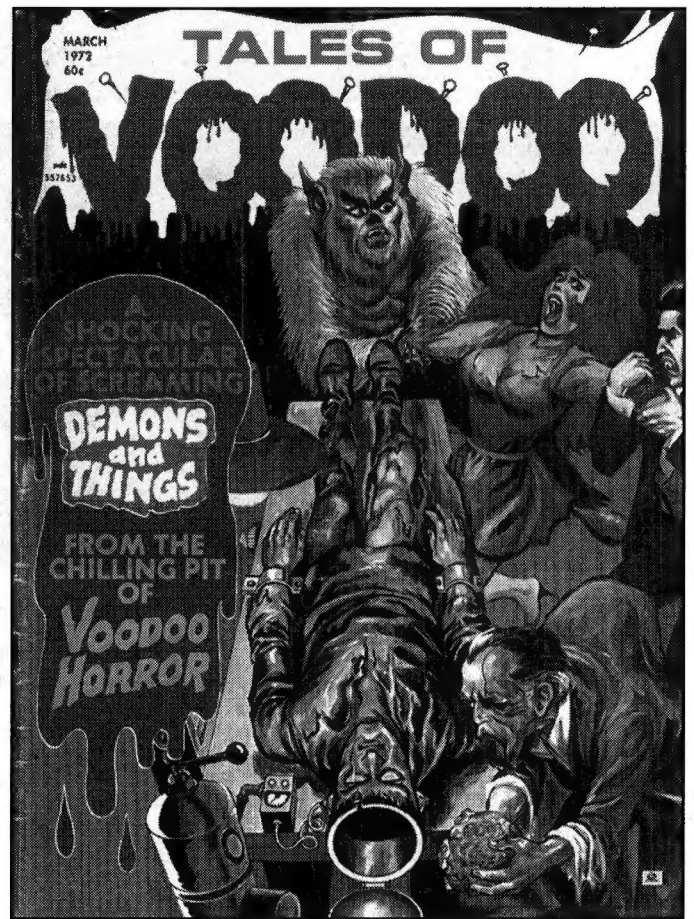
To this day I have yet to try the shit! I mean... can you blame me? And the story titles... "The Slime

Creatures," "A Head Full Of Snakes," "The Skin Crawlers," "The Blood Dripping Head"... I mean, did they just have a board on the wall with thirty or forty



horrific words written on them and throw darts at it? I also noticed that the cover art was very often re-used and re-re-used, sometimes cut-up where just parts of them were re-used, sometimes older parts were combined with parts of *other* older covers, sometimes they'd be the same monsters but re-drawn entirely! This was nutso! In later issues the cover art seemed to be often re-printed on the *inside* cover in black and white.

There was no rhyme or reason to it. Even the numbering of the issues made no sense. And there seemed to be this endless array of different covers too! To this day I am *still* discovering new ones I hadn't seen before! Years later I Xeroxed one of my favorite covers



(see above) to make a flyer for my band Date Bait for our first-ever gig, Halloween weekend (natch), 1988.

I mean, check it out: you have a mad scientist transplanting a brain into a Frankenstein monster while a vampire and a werewolf grapple with a stacked redhead! What a glorious monster mess! The closest things to rival these excessive cover overloads of famous creatures were a few films by directors Al Adamson, Jess Franco and Paul Naschy. Someone needs to publish a nice full-color book showcasing every cover! Are you listening Taschen? Hey, I can dream, can't I?

And today, looking over my collection of these rags, all I can say is... Thanks, Mom!

The Continuing Saga of Dr. Iguana *The Story So Far*



by Ken Burke

The Story So Far!

Help Wanted

Bass Player - Must Be Sane.

I was in a band that literally lasted fifteen minutes.

March 3, 1983.

Three guys I had met that afternoon on the campus of ASU had been jamming with me and my partner Russ all night at the Sun Devil apartments. (When the Pope visited Tempe, Arizona, ours was the only ASU mascot-associated building that didn't temporarily transform its name into Sun Angel.) Armed with a strange mix of grungy electric guitars, bass, violin and flute, we were blasting music off the cinder block walls which benefitted from a harsh kick through the echo unit on my microphone. We thought it sounded really punk - maybe even commercial.

Fortified by several bottles of Carling's Black Label, we decided to start a band. After a little dickering and a few more beers, we decided to call ourselves InZone Out. We played three more songs together and then the bass player instigated an argument over who would be the leader. After a quick hot flash of bickering, the band idea was dropped and the three new guys left after remembering they had classes in the morning.

The dream - what there was of it - had died.

As often as not, things like that happen in the band biz. Some of the happiest hours of my adulthood were spent making music. And indeed, I truly miss the camaraderie of a really good band situation. However, so many bands are rife with

dissension and larded with dysfunctional members, that it is a miracle that more than a handful ever makes it past the initial beer-buddies phase.

For many young bands trying to make the transition from a pool-party jam situation to the professional ranks, taking on a bass player is akin to adopting a necessary evil. As opposed to drums, keyboards, and guitar, the instrument is simple to play and is mainly there for sonic fill. (This doesn't apply to really great bass players. Just band hacks.) If you're lucky, you can latch onto a bass player who - besides making driving rhythmic thunder - also sings back-up harmony and blows a little blues harp, but most can't. As a result, bass players are riddled with self-esteem issues, act out when least expected, and generally don't hang with the same group for very long.

During the days when I was seriously trying to move a band onto the next level of success - like out of my apartment and into clubs - our bass player Mike started to flake out. Initially, he liked the sound we were getting and realized that we could probably play a lot of bars, gaining access to free drinks and loose women in the process. However, after one or two reasonably successful showcase appearances, he started blowing off practices. At open mic spots, he had to be begged to join us on stage. Once there, he'd seem distracted, bored, or embarrassed and fluff the simple runs that he performed flawlessly during apartment jam sessions.

Finally, Russ and I cornered him and asked what the hell was up.

"Ah, I've got nothing to do up there."

"Well, you're the bass player. How about playing the bass?"

"No, I mean, you guys get all the attention. What's in it for me?"

"The same thing that's in it for us, the music."

"I think I want to sing."

"Well, you've never sung before, why do you want to start now?"

"I want to sing!"

"OK, let's work out a number at our next rehearsal."

"Who's going to play bass?"

"We assume that you will."

"No, I don't want to get stuck playing bass."

"What?"

"If people see me playing bass, they'll think that's all I can do."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Fuck you, man. I want to sing."

All logical inquiries were truculently blocked, and we were forced to make a decision on the spot. At this juncture, I should point out that all bands make compromises somewhere along the way. Russ once knew of a rockabilly band whose lead singer - an ugly, acne-ridden English exchange student - was allowed into a local band by virtue of his ownership of a 1957 Cadillac hearse. (Not only was the vehicle a classy antique from early rock's greatest year, it easily transported both the band and their equipment. Nice.) In our case, even though our sound had yet to jell, we felt that we had a good group of guys. We all liked one another, enjoyed the same musical genres, and had a blast drinking beers and making a racket under the guise of music. So, rather than kick Mike to the curb - which, in retrospect, we should have - we brought Evan in to play bass.

Although not an official member of the group yet, Evan was a damned good bass player and he could even sing harmony.

That said, Mike - who proved a tuneless vocalist - didn't even bother learning the words to the songs he wanted to sing. During certain passages his face would go blank and he'd just let us play until a half-remembered word or two would filter back in.

"Mike, man...you've gotta learn these songs."

"OK. OK. Sure."

Two rehearsals and a pool party later, the former bassist seemed to know even fewer lyrics

than he had earlier. Russ rounded on him while we were packing up.

"I thought you said that you were going to learn these lyrics."

"Oh...blow me, asshole."

I had agreed to let the ever diplomatic Russ handle band business, but this pissed me off.

"You made a big deal about not wanting to get stuck being a bass player and becoming one of the vocalists and we accommodated you, right?"

"Aw man, fuck you."

Russ, Evan, Toby, and three departing party guests had to pry me off Mike after I shoved him to the ground and jumped on him. (A combination of too much potential, too much caffeine, and far too little patience has always been my curse.)

Once the scuffling stopped, Toby cajoled Mike into saying what was on his mind.

"You guys are fooling yourselves if you think this band is any good. I didn't learn my songs because I didn't want to be thought of as just another lame-ass in a fake-out rockabilly band."

Russ quietly asked what had changed his opinion from just a month earlier, when he proudly pronounced that we "could really make it."

"Fuck, I was just telling you guys the shit you wanted to hear. I don't even like rockabilly."

Our collective mouths dropped open as he offered the kicker.

"Besides, I'm playing with a real good band now."

A sharp, mocking laugh shattered the tension. It was mine.

"Mike, do you mean to say that you're actually cheating on us with another band?"

Everyone laughed, except Mike.

"You fuckers won't laugh when you hear us. I'm the only guy in an all-girl punk band and we blow shit up."

While Toby persuaded the former bassist/ would-be singer to reveal that his current girlfriend was the new band's leader, the rest of us shook our heads and finished packing up.

Russ whispered something to Evan, who stood outside the passenger-side door of Toby's van after we all climbed in. Mike was about to get in when Evan suddenly jumped in, slammed the door, locked it, and smirked through the partly lowered window, "Sorry, only band members ride in the van."

As Toby pulled out of the parking lot, Russ hollered, "You don't get the bass and amp back

until you pay me back the money I loaned you to buy it."

That's how Russ came to own his very own bass guitar and Fender Bassman amp.

Friends prior to the group's formation, our drummer Toby stayed in touch with Mike for a while, and we eventually learned the rest of the story. Once we decided to drop the unscrupulous bassist in favor of Evan, four things happened to Mike.

1.) He discovered that his new lead singer - the seventeen-year-old high school girl - had given him a social disease.

2.) Because he no longer owned an instrument, he was summarily kicked out of the punk band, too.

3.) The seventeen-year-old high school girl decided to dump Mike and give a social disease to someone else.

4.) The all-girl punk band quickly transformed into an Indigo Girls-type acoustic outfit. Lest you think that's boring, they periodically blew up war toys with cherry bombs on stage.

With Evan as our bass player, we began to make some genuine progress. People could actually dance to the tunes that they were supposed to dance to, and Toby began to play with a genuine sense of groove. We built momentum at several pool parties, barbecues, and open night club slots over the course of several weeks.

Then suddenly, Evan started to get the same bored look on his face that Mike had previously worn. Too proud to actually screw up, Evan did forget to come in with vocals several times. Naturally, we asked if something was wrong.

"I ...uh...bought a Fender Stratocaster a few weeks ago."

"That's great. Why is that a problem?"

"I'd like to play lead guitar in the band."

"Russ is our lead player, but if you want to play on a number or two, that's OK."

"Who's going to play bass?"

"Well, if you don't mind how bad we sound, I suppose Russ or I could take over for a song or two."

"What about the rest of the time?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't want to get stuck playing bass."

Here's the odd thing. In just a few weeks, Evan had become a far better rhythm guitarist than Russ and every bit his equal as a lead player. Further, he was better looking and a far better singer than I was. After a month of obsessive playing and practicing, he dwarfed us all. He never officially quit

the band. He just walked away from rehearsal one day and never came back.

Evan is still the finest all-round young talent I ever heard, but his obsessive focus and lack of interpersonal sincerity actually scared us a little. There's a line in Ronnie Hawkins' song "Mary Lou," "I had a '57 Ford and a two dollar bill, the way she took that lord it gave me a chill." Well, the way Evan left us practically gave us frostbite.

We ran through a few jam session bass players who rehearsed with us more to lap up our beer than to create a compelling fusion of rockabilly and blues. The last one of any note was John Connor. John was a hard-drinking college student who loved to kibbutz with Russ about politics. A pretty fair bass player, he seemed at war with Toby, always pushing the drummer to increase the strength of his attack.

John - who lasted longer than all our other bassists combined - actually got us paying gigs through his friends, and was pretty good about cadging free beers too. However, after several months he came to us with a request.

"I want to play lead guitar and sing a couple of songs."

"Who'll play bass?"

"Hell, we don't need a bass player for the stuff I do."

True enough, our bassist played and sang so badly, there would have been no possible way to support him musically. Yet, the solo spots made John happy, impressed his friends, and truthfully, they got the well-connected souse laid more than a few times.

By the way, I was actually part of his seduction technique. He'd find a girl he liked and introduce her to me. Once he introduced me to a stunning blonde named Yvonne.

"Ken, this is Yvonne. Isn't she beautiful?"

"Everybody's beautiful, John."

"Yvonne, this is Ken. He can write a song about anything. Ken, quick! Write a song about Yvonne."

So, I'd think half a second and sing a little couplet like: "Yvonne. The blonde. I wonder if deep down you really care. Yvonne. The blonde. I wonder if you are truly blonde way down there."

Despite my crude musical insult, John walked off with Yvonne that night.

Eventually, John got the yen to drop the bass - which he was fairly good at - and become the leader of his own band. There were no hard feelings. John never felt like he was one of us. Still,

his contributions were missed, and one night after I witnessed his disorganized, messy-sounding band driving people off the dance floor and out of the bar, I asked, "John, why did you leave a band like ours, that had potential to be really good, to be in this mess?"

He gave me an answer that I have since wanted to print on t-shirts and bumper stickers: "Ken, I'd rather be the leader of the crappiest combo in Arizona, than play bass in the greatest band that ever existed."

At least he was honest about it.

Later, just before I left Tempe during the mid-80s, a bass-playing friend of Russ' came to me for advice. He wanted to call his band "The Dicks."

When I asked why, the proposed group leader snarled, "Because every member of the band has at least one."

Russ asked why they just didn't go ahead and use the name.

"I don't think we could get bookings," was the reply. "Clubs would be afraid to advertise our appearance."

Russ asked me to suggest something.

I said, "Well, maybe you could get cute with it."

"How?"

"Call your band something like 'The Short-For-Richards' or simply 'Richard's Nickname'."

"Richard's Nickname? That would sound like

we were too polite to go by our real name," the group's leader spat.

"Maybe," I replied. "But your audience would always be thinking about what 'Richard's Nickname' is, and they'd laugh and feel closer to you because they were in on the joke."

"That's fucking idiotic," he sneered, "I thought you were supposed to be smart."

So, looking at his Mohawk - which was dyed a neon shade of violet - I suggested that he name his band "Purple Head and the Dick-Tones."

For some reason he didn't find this as amusing as Russ and I did. While we were laughing, he stomped out of my apartment.

Later, Russ heard that his buddy with the Mohawk had given up on the idea of a band with a provocative name because they were all afraid that they would get into trouble.

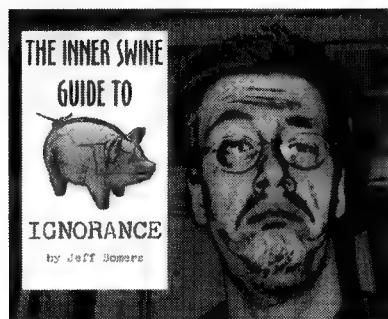
"Sounds like they've stumbled onto a name for themselves without my help," I observed.

"Oh," Russ asked, "What would that be?"

"The Richardless Wonders."

Since then, my attempts to have bass playing categorized as a form of mental illness have proven futile.

(The names have been changed to protect the innocent, the less than innocent, and anyone named Earl. Ken Burke can be reached at driguana1@aol.com.)



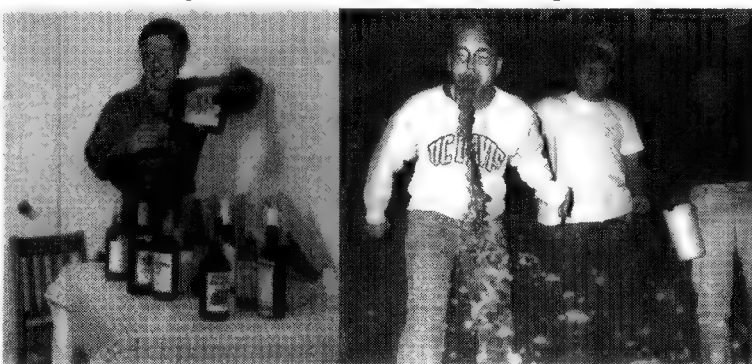
The Inner Swine *Guide to Ignorance* by Jeff Somers

Episode Seven: Monetizing Ignorance

FRIENDS, lord knows there are plenty of things I wish I could forget. Like the time in high school when I got really drunk and. . .well, actually, that covers most of high school, so it might be best to delete those seven years entirely. Or the time in college when I got really drunk and. . .well, actually, those are eight sloshy years that are best forgotten altogether as well, filled with bitterness and heartache, unrequited love and poor diet choices.

The point is, there are plenty of terrible, hurtful memories I'd like to get rid of, most of which involve large groups of people laughing and pointing while I weep. This is where you realize that ignorance, often relegated to insult-comedy and character assassination, can actually have a beneficial effect on your life. Ignorance is not always a *bad thing*, in other words. Properly channeled, it could be one of the greatest medical advances ever.

Consider, if you will, the debilitating effect knowledge has on all of us. Terrible knowledge. Knowledge of pain and suffering, of humiliations and consequences, of evil and of pain. It's a wonder any of us attempt anything after the age of twenty-five. The fact that any adult is in any way functional I put down to the glory of alcohol abuse, although I freely admit the negative effects of such a lifestyle often cancel out whatever false courage The Drink gives you. If we could simply delete unwanted memories whenever we liked, think of how much



Consider that The Drink simultaneously masks our darkest memories (left), allowing us to function, while also creating brand-new horrifying memories (right) to suffer from.

extra courage you would have on a daily basis? I mean, I wonder to myself what kind of Superman would I be if I didn't have this memory of being promoted to Senior Patrol Leader of my Boy Scout troop when I was fourteen, and entering into a six-month slide of *epic fail* that resulted in me shying away from any hint of authority or responsibility ever since. Man, if I didn't have that terrible memory—which involved the scorn and derisive humor of not only the former SPL whose position I inherited, but of the adult Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmasters as well—I might have actually become ambitious in my life. I'd probably already be ruling the world, except for that panic-

inducing experience.

Now, because of my ill-fated attempt to be a teenaged authority figure, I flee any sort of responsibility, and I live in Hoboken with four cats instead of in some secret underground base with an army of mercenaries ready to die for my cause.

Imagine, though, if I could erase that memory and start fresh. Wake up tomorrow and no longer have any idea that taking on a leadership position might lead to humiliation and horror! Sort of like in that movie *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, except instead of erasing bad relationships, erasing any kind of bad experience that now makes you think twice before doing something. In other words, not so much erasing a memory as *inserting* ignorance. Ignorance which then acts to protect you from fear.

After all, why do most of us refuse to do things—say, mainline heroin, or jump out of a plane without a parachute? Simple: we know the consequences and choose to avoid them. But what if we didn't know the consequences? That's right: we'd be Superman. And, yes, most likely dead within a very short period of time. But like the replicants in *Blade Runner*, we'd be gods for that very short period of time, wouldn't we? Unstoppable, completely without any common sense or fear of dismemberment.

Of course, I am old and dissipated by Drink. The world has likely passed me by, and it's too late to save me—besides, my list of humiliations which have scared me into terminal passivity is far too long. You'd pretty much have to delete my personality entirely and reboot me as a thirty-seven-year-old infant. Which no one wants. So I must, instead, bend my intelligence and severe lack of restraint on helping the world altruistically, using my immense fortune and bottomless resources to invent The Inner Swine Bad Memory Redactor.

THE INNER SWINE BAD MEMORY REDACTOR (BMR)

The design of the implement is, of course, pretty simple, and some might say that I'll never get a patent as there is ubiquitous prior art. That doesn't matter—the important part about the Bad Memory Redactor is in its proper use. If you learn where to apply the BMR and with what amount of force, you can surgically remove specific memories with complete accuracy and almost no negative side effects. For the purposes of this essay, we are not counting the *memory loss* as a negative side effect, of course.

The procedure is simple: based on detailed phrenologic diagrams supplied with the BMR, you simply select the spot on the head which will delete the appropriate memory. Then have your subject concentrate on that memory until it is all they are thinking of, filling all of their thoughts. Then you rear back and give an accurate but forceful smack with the implement. Like magic, the memory is deleted.

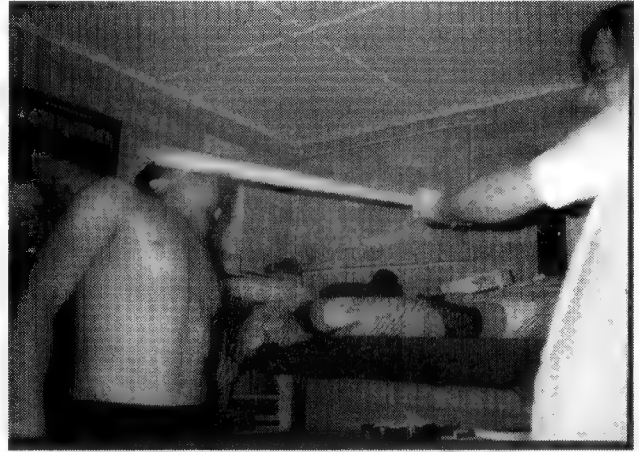
Think about what you could do if you didn't know everything you know! Have trust issues? Burn out a few traumatic experiences from your childhood and ta-da! You'll be a trusting, secure person. Fall out of a tree when you were five and get the heebies every time you're up high? One expert swing of the BMR and you might realize your secret dream of being an acrobat. Haunted by dreams of being naked in front of crowds? One



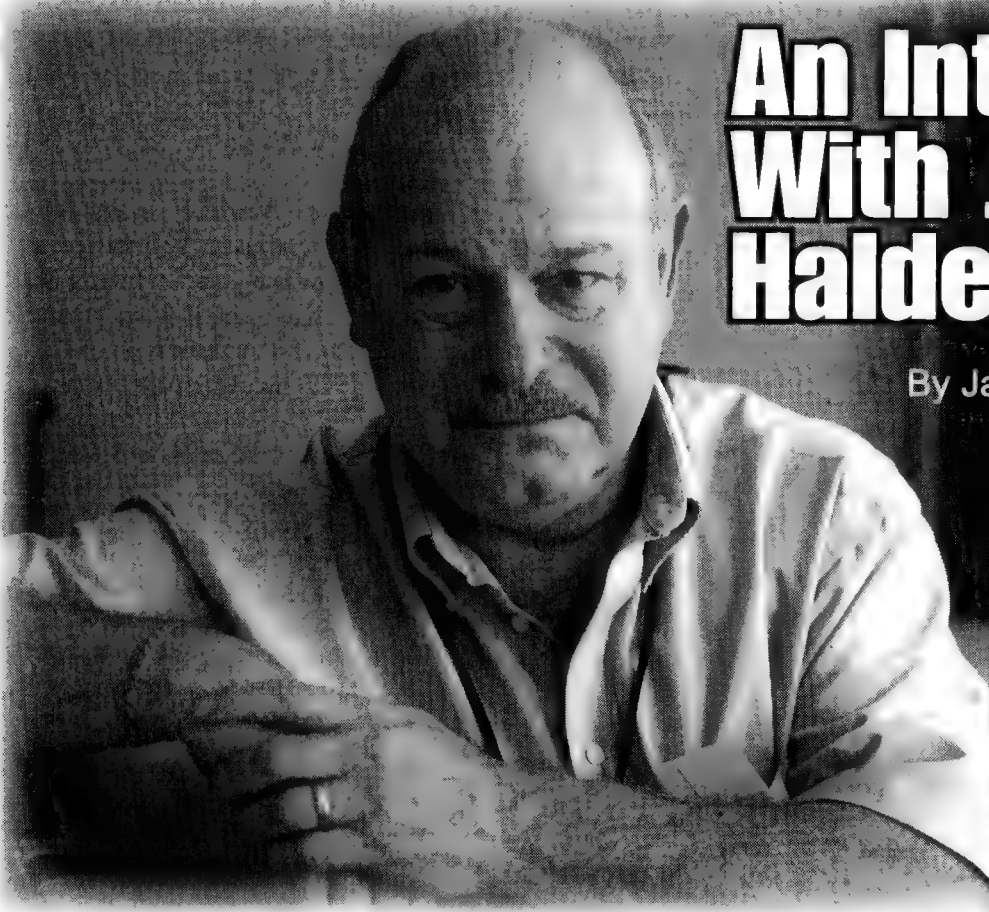
Schematic of the TIS Bad Memory Redactor

quick, slightly excruciating application of the BMR in expert hands and you'll be 'break-dancing on stage in front of thousands in no time.

Ignorance does not have to be solely an affliction—it can be used as a tool as well, the same way debilitating alcohol consumption can help you through trauma even as it rots your brain and destroys your liver. Certainly you don't want to be deleting every single bad memory you have—aside from making you incredibly dull and probably doomed to an early death due to your complete and impenetrable ignorance, the repeated head traumas would probably result in some semiserious and somewhat permanent brain damage. But for dealing with the occasional phobia-inducing searing hell of a memory, it's genius. I'll start the rates at \$1500 per treatment, medical bills not included, though I will throw in a free ride-and-dump to the local Emergency Room if you fail to regain consciousness within an hour. Which hardly ever happens, trust me.



The TIS BMR being applied to a volunteer.



An Interview With Joe Haldeman

By Jayme Lynn Blaschke

Photo by Jayme Lynn Blaschke

The author of twenty novels and five collections, Joe Haldeman remains one of the most popular science fiction writers working today. His landmark novel, *The Forever War*, won the Hugo, Nebula and Ditmar Awards for best science fiction novel in 1975, and spawned two follow-up novels, *Forever Peace* (1997) and *Forever Free* (1998). In total, his writings have garnered him five Nebulas, five Hugos and a host of other awards as well as numerous nominations. A modern-day Renaissance man, Haldeman is an avid poet, painter, and amateur astronomer, as well as a world traveler. He currently lives in Gainesville, Fla., and Cambridge, Mass., with his wife Gay.

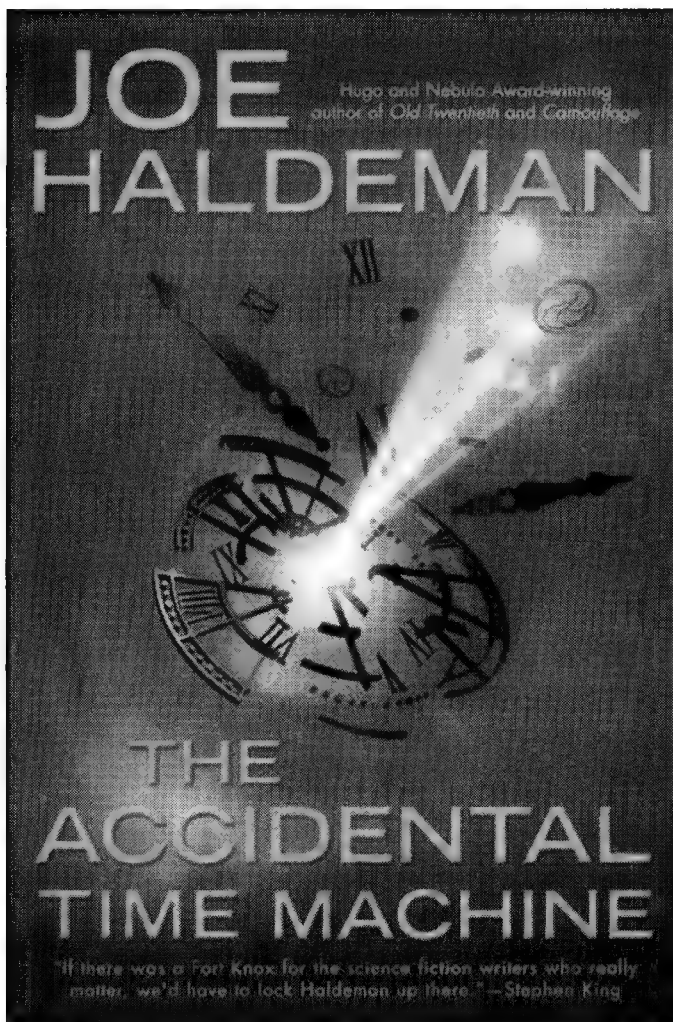
The Accidental Time Machine is your most recent novel, and it's a bit of a departure for you. It's much lighter in tone than your previous novels, and it seems you had fun playing around with the concepts in the book. What prompted

this different approach?

I don't know. It's the first humorous novel I've written since *The Hemingway Hoax* - and in fact, *The Hemingway Hoax* was extremely serious as well as being funny. But *The Accidental Time Machine* is just sort of an entertainment. I never pretended it would be anything other than that. It's an intellectual entertainment, but it's probably not as serious as other novels I've written.

I was glad that it got nominated for the Nebula Award, but I really don't think it's going to win because it isn't a deep and serious novel [note: *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* by Michael Chabon won]. It's basically something for you to read and be amused by.

Because of its different tone, did you find yourself using different skill sets-different writing



muscles-when you were putting it together, as opposed to some of your other writings?

No. I just wrote a novel. It had different intent than most of my novels, but I'm not sure the author is always in total control of what he's doing. I wasn't getting up every morning and saying, "Well now, let's not forget to be funny."

Time travel is one of the great pillars of the science fiction genre, so much so that many writers shy away from it. What were some of the challenges you faced in keeping it fresh?

Well, I used new physics. That was not a difficulty. I do have a degree in physics and astronomy, so I can read the journals and I can use the jargon. That's almost like establishing your own credentials: it's not necessary for the logic of the story that the method of time travel makes sense in terms of physics, because all of these stories are about causality and coincidences and so forth. I was more interested in the characters.

In most of my science fiction I start out with characters and then see where we go.

But this one, literally-I didn't set out to write a time machine story. I just thought of this weird little incident: this young grad assistant pushes a button on the machine and it disappears. And then it reappears. I started writing the story from that.

You've got five Nebs, five Hugos, three Rhyslins, one Tiptree, one World Fantasy and one Campbell award. Some writers specialize in hard science fiction, others are strictly fantasists, but you pretty much run the gamut with your writing, as reflected in the diversity of your awards.

Well, I've always wanted to be a generalist, not to be classified as any one thing. I call myself a "hard science fiction" writer because that's the most difficult of all the things I do.

People say, "Oh, you have five Nebulas, you don't need another one." But in fact, it has a different significance. When you're a young writer and you get a Nebula or something, it's really wonderful. It starts your career off and that's great. But when you're an old guy-and it's been almost forty years since I got my first Nebula-it's very important in a different way, because it means I'm still a player. A lot of people, after they've been writing for forty years... well, you've just got to look at their biographies and their output. Their stuff starts to get a little pale, a little repetitive. It's a pity, but you'd be silly not to see this as a description of more literary careers than otherwise. I've been trying, as you say, to put it all around the map all these years. If I'm starting to repeat myself, at least I have a longer lead time before the repetition comes up.

I'd like to talk just a little about another award you've recently been associated with: your participation in the Oscar-nominated *Operation Homecoming* documentary. How did that come about?

It came about because the guy who's in charge of the National Endowment for the Arts is a fan of my work, and he had to come up with a list of modern novelists who had written about war. He said I was one of the first he'd called.

It's not something you do for money-it was an awful lot of work, actually. I feel for soldiers;

I really think they're getting a raw deal now, and anything I can do that makes their position more clear to the public is worth doing.

Do you ever get frustrated or exhausted by your constant association with the Vietnam War?

Well no, not really. I mean, I'm used to it. Often I'll just try to deflect it. Of course, most of the things I've written don't have anything to do with war. Of the things I've written about war, about half of them don't have to do directly with Vietnam.

Do you ever feel restrained or unfairly pigeonholed because of being so defined as a writer by *The Forever War*?

Well, there's no way I can get out of it now. I think a lot of people are defined by their early work. Every now and then I'll get fan mail that says, "Why don't you write the *Forever War* again?" Gee, you know, I wish I was twenty-six again, too! [laughing]

Have your background and writing given you insight into the current engagements in the Middle East? Do you feel the need to address the issues involved there?

Well, not directly. Anybody who's been a soldier has got to have a set of emotional reactions to what's happening now. I think there are parallels between the two wars, because both were started by the leader of our country lying about the evidence for it. Our war-Vietnam was fought by draftees, and the poor National Guard people who are being put into three years of combat in Iraq when they thought they'd just

have summer camp. That's the same level of lack of responsibility on the part of our leaders. The sense that we're going to war against a country that really didn't have anything to do with us because the president was upset with their leader... So they go have a war? That's kind of

A "splendid little war?"

A "splendid little war." Yeah.

Going back to *Forever War*, you wrote it as your master's thesis for the University of Iowa's

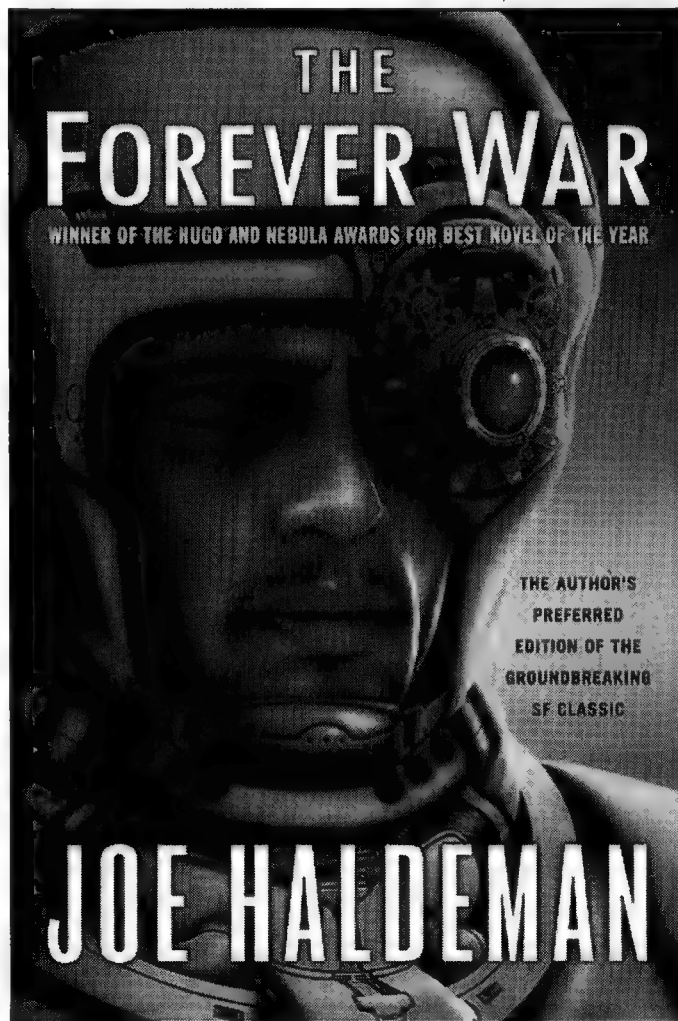
Writing Workshop MFA program. Was that book different because it was written for that purpose than it would've been otherwise?

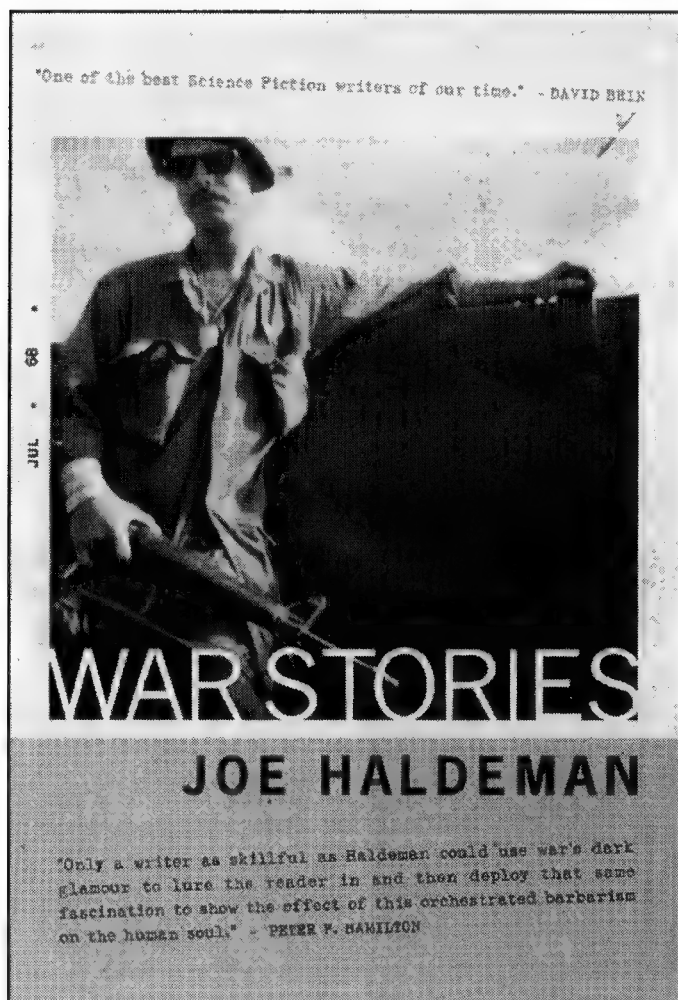
No. In fact, I started it before I got to Iowa. I just wrote the science fiction novel. In fact, I went up to the graduate school office and said, "Okay, I've written this novel," showed them a copy of it and asked, "What are the guidelines for typing it?" They said, "Oh, just put it in a box," and boy, that made my day! It would've cost me a couple hundred bucks to have that thing re-typed, and I wasn't a good enough typist to do it myself-one misspelling and I'd have to take it back!

The fact that it

was going to be my master's thesis was a great big joke for us. It turns out to have been not a joke after all, because that's what led to my getting the professorship at MIT, which has been a third of my life-or at least a quarter of my life, nowadays.

Did you ever encounter any bias against genre in your MFA program?





At Iowa they *hated* science fiction and fantasy. I mean, the guy who was in charge of the school, I think, really felt I had cheated because I didn't tell him. I didn't *deny* I was a science fiction writer, but the main thing I based my application on was the novel *War Year*, which isn't science fiction. Then I got there and all I wanted to write was science fiction. Most of the professors thought it was cool- you know, I was publishing and getting paid for my short stories. That was great!

Obviously, you were a hack.

Yeah! [laughing] Well, none of the professors felt that way. But they read my stuff, and they read it in conjunction with the other students' short stories, and mine were better most of the time. But then I'd been writing professionally for years when I went to Iowa. I'd already sold three books-well, three novels and one short story anthology.

How has teaching at MIT impacted you as a writer?

It gives me a break, actually, from writing from September through December. I normally just write short fiction and poetry, speeches, things like that. I stay away from my novel if I can. Although I'm afraid this year I'll have to write the novel. It's sort of like holding down two full time jobs. I don't look forward to it.

What do you see as the value of graduate studies in writing?

In a practical sense, it's a sort of training ground for people who want to teach writing. It's not a place where you're going to learn to be a writer, which would be silly, because you can't learn that in school. I wish people knew that who think that they're going to go to an MFA program and turn out to be a novelist. It doesn't hurt you- it doesn't hurt most people. It can hurt some people, fatally, for their writing careers if they react badly to criticism. You can be a great writer and have just a really thin skin for criticism, so you shouldn't be exposed to it.

I mean, most people's writing is self-correcting; and if it isn't, you won't be published very often and the books you put out are pretty bad.

What is your creative process?

I write in longhand. After I've written the day's work, I enter it into the computer. About once a week or so, I'll read all of the novel that I'm writing-or at least go back twenty to thirty thousand words to try to keep it going smoothly. I normally write in sequence. Right now I'm not, because I realized that I'd skipped over a part that I have to get back into place to keep the book in balance. It's one of these multiple viewpoint problems where I had a really fascinating character and he started to take over the story. And it's too early for that-I had to have the other character more developed before he stepped in. It's a live and learn type of thing.

Does this project have a title yet?

Yes, it's called *Starbound*. It's a sequel to my next book, which is *Marsbound*.

When's *Marsbound* coming out?

August. It's an interesting book to me, because the style of it changes from the beginning

to the end. Did you ever read *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*?

James Joyce. Yes.

Well, you know how Joyce goes from that baby talk at the beginning through a child speaking with considered, but childish diction, all the way up to an undergraduate who thinks he knows everything but really is lacking? Well, mine is a less subtle and less-I should say a less significant use of that approach-because my main character starts out as a nineteen-year-old woman who's just on the verge of going to college. So much happens in the novel that at the end of it-although she's only about twenty-five-years-old-she's virtually an ambassador to another species, the first alien species we've encountered. Along the way there are lots of things that happen, science fiction tropes about the young woman discovering herself...

Somebody pointed out after I had written it, *The Podkayne of Mars* connection. Which, oh my God, I didn't even think of. It's so weird, because people say that *The Forever War* is an answer to *Starship Troopers*, and I'm sure someone is going to say this one is an answer to *The Podkayne of Mars*. And I'd better read it, because I read it like, what, fifty years ago when it first came out. It wasn't in my mind at all.

So what's the genesis of *Marsbound*?

What happened was Gardner Dozois and Jack Dann asked me to do a novella that was a young adult story for an anthology-I forget the name of it. I said "Okay," and then I asked them, "If I write

this novella, can I develop it into a novel?" And they said sure.

I developed it and I used it as a package to sell a young adult novel to a woman who was specializing in young adult novels. And she didn't want it. Nobody has turned down a proposal of mine in the past thirty-eight years. I said, "Well, I don't think I want to do young adult stuff," so I just updated her. I made her five years older and changed the plot so that it was more appropriate for an older teenager. I got a whole new novel out

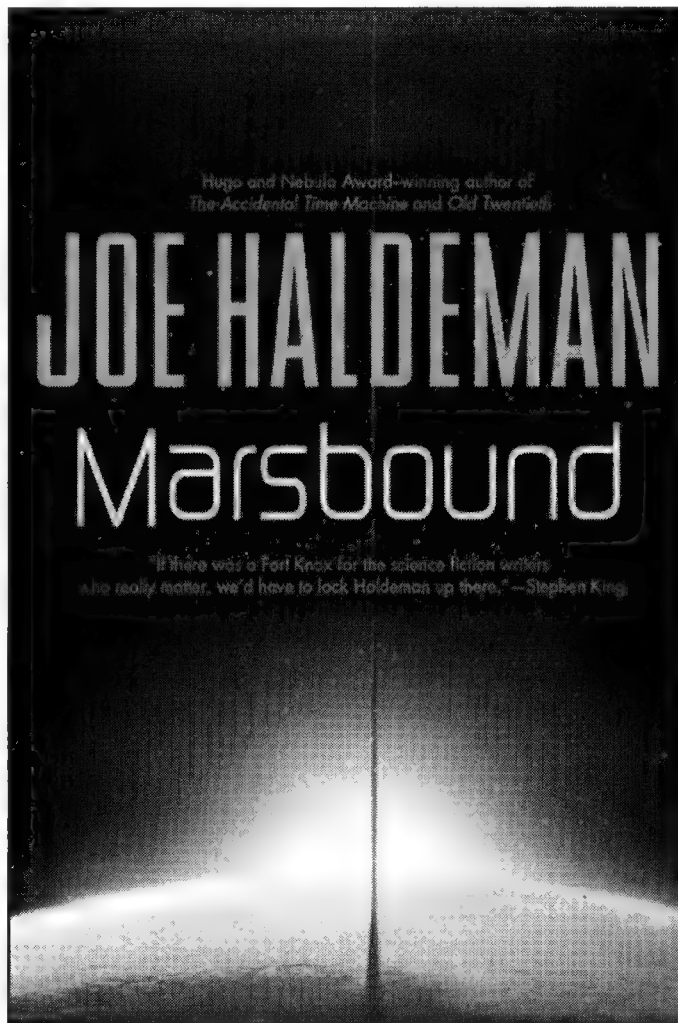
of it, because I had the same character, but she was older. I loved the character when she was fifteen, sixteen-years-old and I like her even more this way. It's just a curious way for a novel to be written... I don't know what the young adult novel would've looked like. [laughing]

A lot of your fiction has been challenging-stylistically, for yourself, and daunting themes for your readers. Are there any challenges out there that you haven't taken up yet?

There are challenges I would do personally, but I can't do because I know they're not commercially interesting. I would love to do a long, totally autobiographical novel that was intellectually

challenging, kind of a *Finnegans Wake* book. But I don't have some source of wealth outside of my writing. I can't afford to spend years doing something that's essentially an examination of myself, although that's what the Zen writer wants to do. That would be a cool project.

I wouldn't mind doing a stage play again. I did one stage play, and that was so much fun. But I'd go broke if I tried to do that. I mean, even though



I have a reputation, there's not that much money in it. It's just great fun, and that's why people do it. I'd love to write a musical, but again, it's not practical. These are things I should've taken care of when I was in my twenties, but I was too busy making money. [laughing]

How has the genre changed since you first published?

The biggest thing is that fantasy has taken over. The tail is wagging the dog, in a way. You can be philosophical about it and say science fiction was always a subdivision of fantasy, but Tolkien took care of that, and *Star Wars* really made writing science fiction set in space a lot more dilute, a lot less scientific. People write space operas now that don't have much to do with actual space travel. I suppose that's okay; it's a different set of challenges. But I don't happen to like it.

Early on in your career, you had a relationship with Gordon R. Dickson, who has passed away. Also, recently Arthur C. Clarke passed away, and Jack Williamson before him. Your writing generation bridged the gap between the Golden Age and the current generation of new writers. What do you see as being lost by the genre as these giants no longer walk among us?

You can almost turn it inside out and say the audience is gone that made those guys great. You write for a certain culture, and the culture they were writing for has evaporated. The culture that has supplanted it is one that they largely helped define.

So yeah, I want to be living back in 1945 and writing really great science fiction and changing the world. I live in the world that they changed. I can't even imagine myself having that kind of effect on American culture. The one author whose work I've studied in a scholarly way is Ernest Hemingway. You couldn't be Ernest Hemingway again, either.

Writing isn't that important. A novelist is not a mover and a shaker anymore. We're sort of part of the entertainment industry-as Hemingway was-but in a quite different way.

You have recently been diagnosed with Type II diabetes. How has that affected your life?

It doesn't have a huge effect. I have to watch my diet and try to lose ten percent of my body weight. I do fine... I guess a lot of people couldn't say this, but if I could stay home, I could lose weight. The past four weeks I've been on the road, I've gained a pound every week. So I've got to get back home, go to the gym, and keep my carbohydrates under control.

It hasn't had a big influence. It's not like some really life-changing disease, which has happened to a lot of my friends. Diabetes is an annoyance, that's about it.

You blog regularly and are readily accessible to your fans online. You seem to have taken readily to all the new technological advances in communication. What does this online interaction mean to you?

Mine might be a little different from most of the people, because I'm one of the first bloggers. I started an interactive diary in 1989 on the old Genie network, so I've been at it for twenty years or however long it's been.

To me, I just had this wonderful revelation when I sat down and started doing it. Writers always get this advice: you should keep a journal. Always keep a journal, and keep track of your life otherwise you'll forget things, blah blah blah. But I've never been able to keep one. I started journals I'm sure twenty times. I'd go for a few weeks and say, "To hell with this-I'm not getting paid for this." But when it became interactive, when you have an audience that would say, "Oh, that's interesting. A similar thing happened to me," and you get a conversation going... to me it became irresistible. I just like the idea of keeping a record of everything that happens to me, and this is a relatively painless way to do it.

The thing is, after you die, the record of your life evaporates. Well, I've always been fascinated by people like [James] Boswell or [Samuel] Pepys, the fact that their records of the minutiae of their daily life are viewed as art-and really as high art-by later generations, even though all they were doing was keeping a coherent record of the daily details of their life. I thought, "There's no reason not to do that now." It's something I do. Theoretically I do it after I've written for the day-this is just sort of finger exercise, typing around. But actually, some of my best writing is in that daily record. I think for obvious reasons, because there are no professional constraints. It doesn't have to make

sense, it doesn't have to be part of a coherent narrative, and so by accident sometimes it's pretty good.

Shifting gears a little, you earned your degree in astronomy as you mentioned earlier. What drew you to astronomy and physics?

It was just natural. By the time I could read, I was fascinated by astronomy. I thought when I was in college I was going to get my Ph.D. in astronomy and go into NASA in the scientist-as-astronaut program. You know, learn how to fly jets and then wind up on the moon. And only one astronaut who walked on the moon came out of that program-Harrison Schmidt. We had our hopes.

At what point did you change your focus?

Vietnam. I came back from Vietnam and I was not going to be an astronaut because I was too shot up. You have to be an athlete.

I had always been writing. When I got back from Vietnam, I wrote up these two short stories I'd written my last semester in college in a creative writing course. I re-typed them, cleaned them up a little bit and I sold them. One of them I sold while I was still in the army, this little three-month period when I cycled out. I just kept writing in graduate school, and I sold a story every month or so, every few weeks. I thought, "Wow. Beer money." It wasn't a lot of money, but it was significant to a graduate student. It was paying the rent.

Then I went to the Milford Conference in 1970, and I met all these writers who were my heroes, like Gordy Dickson and Harlan Ellison, and because they accepted me as an equal-I got the real feeling, "I can really do this for a living." I started to be serious about it, because then I dropped out of graduate school and providentially sold my first novel the next week.

I went to the Iowa Writer's Workshop largely just to get the G.I. Bill and to get the teaching assistantship, which was significant money at the time. It became great training for teaching writing at MIT, of course.

You never gave serious consideration to becoming one of the guys working the scopes at Mount Palomar or Flagstaff?

No, I was realistic about it, I think. I'm only a moderately good mathematician, and so probably wouldn't be that good an astronomer. I love amateur astronomy. I came to the realization while I was still an undergraduate that the main attraction to astronomy for me was aesthetic rather than scientific, and so I've got my telescopes. I can go out and look at the stars any time I want to and not have to come up with the equations that describe what they're doing.

Does that ever play directly into your writing-drawing on your astronomy background?

Yeah. I'll write stories about astronomers and other kinds of scientists and mathematicians. I find mathematicians fascinating to write about, because their professional world is so abstract. It's so hard to explain to other people.

How did growing up in Alaska influence who you are as a writer?

I think it really had a big influence in terms of my feeling toward natural phenomena-astronomical especially, because of the Northern Lights and the long nights. Also, living in Anchorage, surrounded by mountains. Really beautiful, big mountains like the Rockies. It was also a frontier town at the time. I think that might've helped the science fiction a little.

You share that with Robert E. Howard-living on the frontier.

Yeah. I'm not quite as crazy as Robert E. Howard, though. [laughing]

What do you miss most about Alaska?

I went back a few years ago-Gay and I both went. We went back and spent most of the summer wandering through Alaska. What I miss about it largely is what I don't like about living in America, because Alaska is not America. The sense of being really close to nature and having a responsibility toward it. Not because of some political thing-there are more conservatives in Alaska than I'm happy about, but they by and large have respect for nature and want to keep things the way they are, keep things beautiful; keep things working.

Also, you're really close to the raw there,

even now. The winter comes in and there's no question who's boss. Even in the city you're only an hour away from the wilderness where there are real bears and real wolves and things. It's like snorkeling. There are dangerous animals out there, and it gives it a *frisson* even though you know they're not really going to bother you. It makes life interesting.

Last question here, and one I have to ask: What is the story behind the song you've written titled "The Story of Elvis Presley's Sexual Orientation According to Headlines in the National Enquirer"?

Oh! That's... let me see. That was inspired by a little playlet that an outfit called the Boston Baked Theatre did. They put a whole musical together out of articles from the various tabloid magazines. I thought, "Oh, Jesus, I have to write one of those things!"

I think just a couple of days later I sat down

with a guitar and made up that thing. I love writing little humorous songs. I couldn't write a serious song to save my life, but I've written enough little ditties to actually fill up a CD, which I may do production on now.

I'm sure a number of people perked up their ears at that.

Well, people have offered to produce it for me, but really, I could do it myself with a garage band. I just have to have the time to get everything together. I'm going to a convention in July where I'm going to do about an hour of music. I hope by then I'll have the songs down to such an extent where I could sit down with a couple of side men and do an album. I don't know even whether I want to do sidemen and try to make something that's musically interesting, because I could just put up a camera and a couple of mics at one of these science fiction things and just shoot it and then stamp it on a DVD.

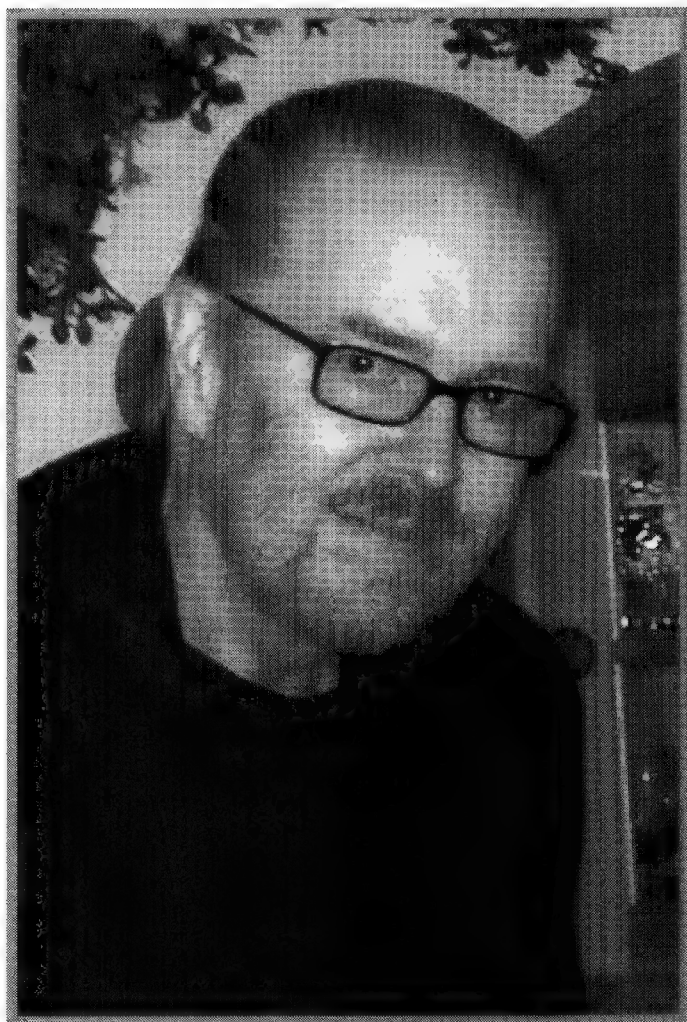
It may not be perfect, but there's something to be said for spontaneity.

-XXX-

VAMPIRES, WITCHES AND WARRIOR – OH MY!

Interview with C. Dean Andersson

By Michael McCarty



C. Dean Andersson is the internationally published author of the 2007 Bram Stoker Finalist short story "The Death Wagon Rolls On By." Horror novels he has written include groundbreaking vampire classics *I Am Dracula* and *Raw Pain Max*, and the controversial *Torture Tomb* pitting feminist witches against snuff film makers. In the Viking heroic fantasy, he created the Bloodsong saga (*Warrior Witch*, *Warrior Rebel*, and *Warrior Beast*), a sword and sorcery epic published in American editions and Russian language hardbacks. Trained from childhood in music, and with diverse degrees in physics, astronomy and art, in addition to writing fiction; Andersson is a professional artist and musician, robotics programmer, and mainframe computer technical writer. His website is: www.cdeanandersson.com

BRUTARIAN: In this issue, you wrote a short story, did the illustration for that same story, and are now doing an interview – all the same guy. Can world domination be far behind?

C. DEAN ANDERSSON: World domination would take up too much time when I could be writing. Talk about

time-consuming day jobs. No thanks!

BRUT: That black and white illustration is incredibly detailed. The raging, gorgon-like horned goddess is drawn in the darkness, but her image only comes out because of the light, a magnificent contrast of black and white. Was this your intent? And did you do it free hand?

CDA: The original is a pen and ink drawing created the old fashioned way. I used stark illumination because the image came piggybacked on a lightning flash during a thunderstorm. I admire black and white illustrations like Harry Clarke's work for Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* and Bernie Wrightson's for *Frankenstein*. Surrealism also inspires me, in particular the paintings of Yves Tanguy and H.R Giger. First time I saw Giger's book *Necronomicon* was before *Alien* was released. I found his art so disturbing I could barely look at it, which of course meant I had to buy the book and study it. Horror writers, like cats and creative scientists, are critters ruled by curiosity and the lure of the forbidden.

BRUT: What can you tell us about the short story "Mama Strangelove"?

CDA: It occurred to me that if you died in one of the real-life horrors raging today in Iraq, and if you did so without strong ties to any particular deity, it would make mythological sense to find the dreaded Sumerian death goddess Ereshkigal waiting on the other side, because Iraq in ancient times was Sumeria. And since the War in Iraq reminds me of the Vietnam "conflict," it seemed right to use a '60s-style title, based upon an obvious Kubrick-movie source. Then, combined with the drawing of the Horned Goddess, it all came together in a short story. One of the Sumerian words associated with Goddesses, by the way, is "mama," meaning "mother."

My muses tend to be the deities that most of today's prevalent mythologies either condemn and denigrate, or ignore and try to forget. The strong and dangerous, so-called dark goddesses, have therefore inspired much of my work. Fans of the status quo that see males as superior to females find such goddesses especially threatening, and the kinds of horror and dark fantasy I prefer challenge that status quo. The Norse death goddess Hel, Loki's daughter, has been in my *Bloodsong* books and other stories, several times, along with Freyja, shamaness-goddess of war, magic, and love. Coming from farther south, the Greek triple goddess Hecate, that crossroads' goddess beloved by witches and dramatized by Shakespeare, consented to appear with high priestess, Medea, in *Fiend*. The rebel

Sumerian goddess Tiamat came to the rescue in *I Am Dracula*. The Babylonian demoness Lamashtu regained her godhead from atop the Matterhorn in *The Lair of Ancient Dream*. And returning to the northlands, the giantess goddess Skadi aided Frankenstein's creation, a reincarnated Viking, in *I Am Frankenstein*.

I do not recall encountering a mythological reference to Ereshkigal's possessing horns and snakes for hair, by the way, but mythologically horns and snakes are associated with ancient power and wisdom, the earth, and the underworld, so they fit. And since I'm still breathing, Queen Ereshkigal was evidently not horribly offended.

BRUT: Why do you write horror?

CDA: I find it fun, for starters, and these days I don't want to waste time on fiction writing that is not fun. But also, I'll repeat the story I told when asked this same question by a guy with a very similar name to yours in the book *On Writing Horror*. Thinking back, while in elementary school I once gave a speech, complete with crayon drawings as illustrations, to my grandmother's church group. I'd read a book on UFOS and seen *The Thing* on TV, so I was trying to scare them into realizing the danger of space aliens. I warned them, "Keep watching the skies!" Their reaction was to think me awfully cute. But the trait that motivated me then is still with me: to show people things they've never seen, give them thoughts they've never had and feelings they've never experienced, all while having some fun telling a good story. If I need an artsy excuse for my motivation, I can quote Tristan Tzara's 1918 *Dada Manifesto*: "Art should be a monster that casts servile minds into terror." Of course, I should also warn you that waking up people can make them grumpy, especially if new ideas do not validate their previously cherished beliefs, so if you're not merely thought to be cute, you might become unpopular. On the other hand, those people are probably not reading stories like mine, anyway. That's showbiz!

BRUT: Do you have a sense if a book is going to be successful or not? What books surprised you by their success?

CDA: If you're happy with what you create, that's success. But as for what becomes of a story when it's released into the world and the publishing industry takes over, does any writer have a clue? My version of the Countess Bathory story, *Raw Pain Max*, had good sales potential in the days when horror novels were booming and boundaries in horror fiction were being demolished. Splatterpunk was on the horizon. Then, surprise! A major

book chain passed on carrying *RPM*, not because of the content, but because the excellent J.K. Potter cover art did not appeal to the chain's book buyer, which cut the publisher's bottom-line enthusiasm, advertising budget, and the print run. Afterward, I wondered if anyone had found and read *RPM* at all. Those were pre-Internet days. Couldn't Google it. Then a woman at a convention thanked me for writing *RPM* and said that reading it had helped her, because reading it had been like reading her own autobiography. At another convention, a woman who'd worked as a stripper wanted me to help with her memoir, because *RPM* made her think I could understand the hell she'd been through. And at a World Fantasy Con I met an excellent artist who told me he'd had his girlfriend read to him from *RPM* to inspire him while he painted. Another *RPM* surprise came when I attended my first World Horror Convention. Without my being aware of it, *RPM* had become what one dealer called a "cult classic." He had a big price on the used paperback copy he was selling. And other writers I respected told me they were fans of the book. Now it's been requested that I have the book reprinted. Good idea. So, I checked with Raw, and when I find the right publisher, she'll be happy to dust off her whips and chains, kick-start her Harley, and ride again.

BRUT: *The Lair of Ancient Dreams* is a historical Lovecraftian horror fantasy novel. Do you still enjoy and find inspiration in H.P. Lovecraft's work? And if Lovecraft were alive today, what would he be doing for a living?

CDA: Yes, his work still inspires. As for what Lovecraft would be doing for a living today, after he'd written a daily blog on astronomy and another on literature, he might go to a day job as a tech writer. Technical documentation has a lot in common with imaginative fiction. You have to make difficult concepts and improbable things believable and understandable. Speaking of H.P.L., if you ever hoped or feared that Cthulhu and company are more than just fiction, give Kenneth Grant's books a try, such as *Outside the Circles of Time*, *Hecate's Fountain*, *Cults of the Shadow*, *Nightside of Eden* and *Outer Gateways*. He treats the Old Ones as an occult reality. They're difficult books to read if you're like me and not a specialist trained in the terminology, methodology, and poetry of Crowley-esque, left-hand-path Qabalistical magick. But Grant is worth the effort. Good food for deep thoughts, deep and dark.

BRUT: You've written about vampires in your books *I Am Dracula*, *Crimson Kisses*, and *Raw Pain*

Max. Are vampire books easier or harder to write than other genre books? Why or why not?

CDA: We're not talking about selling a vampire novel to a publisher here. You'd have to ask an agent or editor about that. But as you no doubt know yourself, writing a novel is never easy, no matter the genre. It can be fun, and it had better be, or chances are it will never get finished, in my case at least, but it's always hard work, seems to me, if you're doing it right, going back and doing adequate self-editing, all of that. But with the hordes of vampire books in print now, if you develop a unique outlook, anything you write should also be unique. And if vampire stories are something you're into, something that's fun for you to write about and explore, then go forth and stick to it and do it. No publisher's stake has yet been able to make the vampire genre die. It's an ancient human fear and fascination that keeps coming back in new ways. Find one of those new ways, and it should not be any harder to write a vampire novel than any other kind. Your own book *Liquid Diet* is a good example of finding a different and entertaining approach.

BRUT: What are some of your favorite vampire books by other vampire writers?

CDA: My favorite will always be Bram Stoker's original *Dracula*. I've read it several times. Always brings back the creepy feeling I got first time I read it as a kid. After *Dracula*, my next two favorites are Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* and Theodore Sturgeon's *Some of Your Blood*. Add Stephen King's loving homage to the genre, *'Salem's Lot*, of course. I also enjoyed the novelization of *Dracula's Daughter*, written by Ramsey Campbell, I believe, under the pen name of Carl Dreadstone. *DD* was my first childhood encounter with vampires. I saw it one night late on TV. Still love watching it. Gloria Holden was perfect. And that great last line intoned by Edward Van Sloan's Van Helsing, "She was beautiful when she died...a hundred years ago."

BRUT: Why did you choose to write about *Dracula* and Erzebet Bathory in the first place?

CDA: I've already mentioned that Stoker's *Dracula* remains my favorite vampire novel, but nothing ever satisfied me, in fiction or non-fiction studies of vampire beliefs, regarding exactly how *Dracula* became a vampire. So, I ended up writing my own explanation. And I became fascinated by Countess Bathory in childhood after reading about her in William Seabrook's *Witchcraft*. As a writer, I wondered how a modern woman might deal

with discovering she was the reincarnation of Erzebet, a Hungarian noblewoman who killed and tortured hundreds of young women, and how that former life might be influencing her current life as a whip-wielding, live-sex S&M stage performer called Raw Pain Max who is driven by the same urges that drove Erzebet. Does she fight those dark and violent needs? Give into them like Erzebet did? Or find a way to transform them into fantasies? That's the struggle.

BRUT: *I Am Dracula* is an epic vampire novel about Vlad the Impaler and his struggle with Satan stretching over five centuries. Did this novel involve a lot of research into Vlad?

CDA: Yes. I studied *In Search of Dracula* and the other books about Prince Vlad written by the historians McNally and Florescu, also Leonard Wolf's notes in his *Annotated Dracula*. I also re-read Stoker's *Dracula* and many non-fiction books about vampires, too, the Montague Summers classics, for example. *Crimson Kisses*, published in 1981, became one of the earliest how-Vlad-became-a-vampire novels, a hidden history of Vlad, showing how he became Stoker's vampire king, that did not violate known history or Stoker. Trouble was, *CK* had a cliff-hanger ending that was meant to lead into a series of novels. But *CK*'s editor left *CK*'s publisher, and the series did not happen. So, twelve years later I wrote *I Am Dracula*. *CK*'s editor had preferred a third-person approach, so my original proposal called *I Am Dracula* and written in first-person, had to be rewritten into third-person and retitled *Crimson Kisses*. This, with the invaluable help of an excellent, already-published writer, Nina Romberg, under an androgynous pen name, "Asa Drake." But with *IAD*, I gave the story back its original title and rewrote it again, returned it to first-person, expanded *CK*'s ideas, revised it with updated knowledge, and resolved *CK*'s cliff-hanger ending.

BRUT: One of my favorite characters in your books is Tzigane, who appears in both *I Am Dracula* and *Crimson Kisses*. What was the inspiration for this character? And will she ever appear in any short stories or other novels in the future?

CDA: Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame* is, after *Dracula*, the book I've re-read the most. The first film version I saw as a kid was the one starring Gina Lollobrigida as the Gypsy, Esmeralda. Looking back, that's probably Tzigane's origin. So, when I discovered that a tribe of Gypsies were *Dracula*'s allies in Stoker's novel, I wondered why and speculated that maybe one of their own had initiated Vlad into vampirism, a proud and powerful Gypsy woman

devoted to a cause she saw as vital and just. Tzigane also has a small but important role near the end of *I Am Frankenstein* and is mentioned in *Fiend* by the immortal Greek witch Medea who knows her. Then, too, she's in the new *Dracula* novel I'm working on now. And remember, in *I Am Dracula* Vlad reveals that Stoker's *Dracula* was Tzigane's idea, and that she secretly and mischievously used hypnosis and telepathy to inspire and control Stoker's writing. So, it all comes full circle, and anything in Stoker that does not agree with the "truth" in *I Am Dracula* is therefore Tzigane's fault. That probably goes for accepted "history" too, and maybe movie versions. That hairdo Gary Oldman wore at the first of Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* looks to me like something Tzigane would have dreamed up, and then laughed her head off at the premier. Vampire humor is tricky.

BRUT: You have written *I Am Dracula* and *I Am Frankenstein*. Do you have any other classic monsters you would like to write in the "I Am..." format?

CDA: I was set to write *I Am the Mummy* and *I Am the Wolfman* next, but the publisher changed my editor, and the new one wanted everything I wrote to be traditional. Nothing wrong with that approach, but the term "creative differences" applied. So, things just didn't work out between us, and those books were not written. But I still might write them and others, eventually, Tzigane willing. Yes, that's it. It was all Tzigane's fault! I would have played ball with that editor, but Tzigane refused, and I did not want a centuries old vampire mad at me. Would you?

BRUT: The Bloodsong Saga is an epic series with *Warrior Witch*, *Warrior Rebel* and *Warrior Beast*. In the first one, Bloodsong comes back from the dead to work for the death goddess Hel because Hel is holding her daughter, Guthrun, hostage. In the second one, Bloodsong fights to rescue her daughter from Hel's forces, who want to awaken the dark magic Hel buried in Guthrun's soul. In the third one, Hel uses the powers Bloodsong helped her regain in the first book to invade the Lands of Life. With all of the warriors, shapeshifters, witches, gods and goddesses, how did you keep track of all the characters and places? Was it fun to write about Norse barbarian women warriors? And what are your thoughts on the covers by artist Boris Vallejo?

CDA: The characters and places mostly took care of themselves. Sometimes I looked back at a previous book to check on something, of course, but all three were written within a year and a half, so it all stayed fresh in

my mind. Writing the books was fun, because of my long-time interest in Norse mythology.

My father was born in Sweden, and so early I became interested in Scandinavian themes. I began wearing a replica of a Viking Age Thor's hammer medallion while I was in the Air Force. Years later, I discovered that others had begun doing that too, first in conjunction with the rebirth of the Old Norse religion called Asatrú, and later by Scandinavian rock musicians like the Swedish group Bathory, whose leader, the late Quorthon, invented the Viking metal genre and dedicated a song to me because of my Bloodsong saga, "One Rode to Asa Bay," on Bathory's *Hammerheart*. I'm proud of that. It's a fine song. But back to Bloodsong.

Norse myths had not been used as much in fantasy as the Celtic myths at the time Bloodsong was created, nor were women warriors often featured as lead characters in those days before Xena conquered TV and warrior women in heroic fantasies became the norm. You could still hear serious discussions by respected elder writers at conventions about whether a female character could ever be truly believable as a warrior. Bloodsong fought to save her daughter for the first time less than a year before Sigourney Weaver blew 'em away to save Newt in *Aliens*, and then later a tough Linda Hamilton battled a terminator to save her son in *T2*. The times they were a changin' for the acceptance of strong women fighting back, and I'm proud Bloodsong was part of it.

Regarding the Vallejo covers, they are all gorgeous, and I thank him for doing such outstanding work for Bloodsong. Some people thought he exposed too much flesh on the women, but remember, he was boldly using female bodybuilders as models for my warrior women at a time it was controversial to show women with muscles. Yes, there was such a time! And using bodybuilders for models wouldn't have made much sense if they'd been dressed in overcoats. Plus, Conan was always running around next to naked, muscles gleaming. On the other hand, I show on my website what the Russian artist, Ilia Voronin, did with Bloodsong on the covers of the Russian language editions fifteen years later. His Bloodsong is a pumped-up, scarred, tattooed, and armor-clad warrior, just as magnificent as Boris' visions, but in a different way.

BRUT: As you've mentioned, your Bloodsong books have been translated into a different language. Do you need to keep that international audience in mind as you write? Do you work closely with any of the translators?

CDA: No. The Russian publisher, Alpha-Kniga, translated the Bloodsong books without any involvement

from me. Someone who knows Russian read some passages to me, though, and it was close to the English. Maybe the Russian audiences liked them because of the old Scandinavian connection. Some Vikings, in particular Swedes, went east into Russia. There are historians who think the name Russia came from a name given to those Swedish Vikings, *rus*, meaning red, referring to their reddish-blond hair. They were traders, mainly, and established trading towns such as Kiev and Novgorad.

BRUT: Happy endings in novels: good, bad, and indifferent?

CDA: Anything goes, as long as it "works." I usually prefer there to be at least some hope of a happy ending. But one of my favorite endings is from Hugo's *Notre Dame*. If you've only seen the Hollywood film versions where they let Esmeralda live, you don't know the power of the original. Esmeralda dies. Then Quasimodo finds her in the tomb, curls up with her corpse in his arms, and stays there until he also dies. We know this because years later two skeletons, one hunchbacked and misshapen, are found entwined, and when they try to separate him from hers, it crumbles to dust. That ending still gets me. But there are also those wonderful endings like in Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama* or his *Childhood's End* or his "Nine Billion Names of God" or his "The Star," or at the end of Richard Matheson's *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, endings that leave you clutched by a deep sense of wonder and/or gasping with surprise. I love those, too. And the last page of Graham Masterton's *Tengu* is an ending I admire simply because it's totally merciless, in a mega-doom kind of way. There are also endings that are only happy ones from a certain viewpoint. Was the ending to Stoker's *Dracula* a happy one if you were hoping Count Dracula would escape Van Helsing's gang? Considering Tzigane was behind it, though, we could look upon it as just another of her happy little Vampire jokes.

BRUT: Last words?

CDA: Thanks for all the good questions and for giving me the chance to urge everyone one more time to please, please, "Keep watching the skies!" Because those long-dead, ex-church-going, ex-grandmothers from my small home town still think I'm awfully cute, according to Tzigane. What more could a horror writer ask?

*“I’ve got plenty of cash and a fine mink coat,
but they can’t give me what I need the most.
I need a man to love me!”*

THE BARBARA PITTMAN INTERVIEW

By Ken Burke

Although she sang professionally for over forty years, blues-belting Barbara Pittman’s claim to fame rested on the handful of singles she cut at the legendary Sun studios during the late 1950’s. A saucy, Elizabeth Taylor looker with a rowdy rockin’ edge, Pittman was the most prominent female recording artist on a label glutted with such top male talent as Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Rich, Roy Orbison, Billy Lee Riley and Warren Smith.

Pittman came by her bluesy style quite honestly, soaking up the same culture and influences which propelled her childhood friends Elvis Presley and the Burnette brothers to rockabilly fame. Like her Sun labelmate Riley, Pittman actually forged

a far more prosperous career on the West Coast than she ever did in Memphis. However, the constant reissue of her Sun and Phillips International sides has opened up a whole new career overseas.

A living witness to the Memphis rock’n’roll explosion, Pittman’s good humor and colorful storytelling enlivened several interviews I conducted with her c. 1999 - 2004. During our lively exchanges, we discussed her days at Sun, her California career, Dewey Phillips, and of course Elvis.

BQ: Tell us about where you were born and raised.

BP: I was born right here in Memphis. I was born in an attic on Easter Sunday. We were very poor. I have twelve brothers and sisters all together.



BARBARA PITTMAN



www.rockabillyhall.com

(Courtesy of the Rockabilly Hall of Fame)

My father tried to be the father of our country, I do believe. We were right in the city, in just a horrible poverty situation. But we overcame and we all made it. I guess just because you're born in poverty means that you don't have to turn out bad.

BQ: When did you get the "bug" to sing?

BP: When I was three, I was singing "He May Be Your Man But He Comes To See Me Sometimes."

BQ: [laughing] Now somebody had to put you up to that. Who taught you that song?

BP: Well, I used to hang around Beale Street. My uncle by marriage use to have a pawn shop on Beale Street and that's where I grew up. There was a record out of it at that time, I forget who it was, but I liked it and started singing, "He may be your man..." And everybody on Beale Street started gathering around me to hear this little half-pint sing those lyrics. I've been singing the blues ever since.

BQ: Do you think of yourself as primarily a blues singer?

BP: Oh absolutely. I've got the voice and everything of just a real good belting blues singer.

BQ: Did you follow any blues singers around on Beale Street when you were little?

BP: No, I couldn't follow anybody around. [laughs] My singers when I was growing up was Little Richard, Lavern Baker, and even Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughn. That's what I liked when I was a little girl. I never did go in for country or jazz, not even rock'n'roll that much.

BQ: What about pop music?

BP: Oh no, I didn't like the pop scene at all in those days; it was just too cutesy.

BQ: Did you listen to *Red, Hot, & Blue* with Dewey Phillips?

BP: Oh yes! And I was on his first TV show. Myself and Warren Smith were the first artists he ever had on his TV show. I did Elvis' "You Ain't Nuthin' But A Hound Dog." The format he did was like he was doing his radio show and we'd sit around behind him and then get up and perform our records. I didn't have a record out at that time.

BQ: You did this with a live band?

BP: No, we would tape it at the studio and we would lip synch it. I think I also did Lavern Baker's "Tweedle Dee" and the Elvis song.

BQ: So you recorded these songs?

BP: Just for that show. I have both of those things that I did on that show. [laughs] It was horrible! That was when I was *really* young.

BQ: When did you turn pro?

BP: Well, when I went to California, actually. I never made any real money in Memphis. My first singing job where I got paid was with Elvis at the Eagle's Nest, and the juvenile court authorities found out I was there and they made me quit. My stepfather turned me in. [laughs] And I couldn't even work in Memphis after that because I was too young. Anyway, I went on the road with cowboy movie star Lash Larue.

BQ: What was his live show like back then?

BP: Well, you know he was "King Of The Bullwhip," and he did the regular things like knocking ashes off of a cigarette, putting out fire, and doing a fight scene with a stunt man he had with him, and



Barbara Pittman

singing a song. He had a pretty good voice. And we ended the show doing a gospel song, and that was our show.

BQ: How were you featured in Lash Larue's show?

BP: I sang. We had a little trio with us and I sang. I did things like "I'll Never Let You Go" and I even sang some of his original material he had written. I didn't do that much. I'd go out and sing two or three songs, but mostly he'd have me out front selling his pictures.

BQ: So you were learning the business from the ground up?

BP: Absolutely! I was on the road and that was really my first real job. We traveled all over the country. He signed a contract with my mother that he would tutor me and everything. He took very good care of me...until the tour was over and he dropped me at a phone booth [laughs] in Columbus, Ohio. Fortunately, I had a cousin who lived there, so I stayed with them for a while before I came back to Memphis.

BQ: I hesitate to ask you this because you've had to talk about it so much, but please tell us how you knew Elvis.

BP: I grew up in the same neighborhood in North Memphis. Of course I was a few years younger than Elvis, but my brothers knew him at school. They all went to Humes. My older brother knew him from the teenage years.

BQ: And your mother knew Elvis' mother?

BP: Yes, they had Stanley parties, which were like Tupperware parties today, and they'd get together and sell these little brushes and combs and everything, and play these little games. And my mom would go to their house or Mrs. Presley would come to ours.

BQ: Just good neighbors, eh?

BP: Yeah. They were both dieticians at St. Joseph Hospital here and that's how they met each other. From that time on, I would see Elvis around town. My Uncle Abe and I would go to the movies uptown all the time, and he was an usher at one of the theaters. That was while he was still in high school. I was just

a little girl and I was running around behind him and suddenly one day I grew up and he says "Hello dere!" [laughs]

BQ: Did you also know Johnny & Dorsey Burnette?

BP: Very well, yes. They grew up in the same neighborhood; all these people were in North Memphis.

BQ: What was it about that region which bred such stellar talents?

BP: It was *the* white poor neighborhood in Memphis. You had the poor Irish people and poor little Southern people. It was cheap living and cheap housing there. That was just where everybody ended up when they came to Memphis. But Johnny and Dorsey were both born here, too.

BQ: Tell us something about them. I've read that they were rough boys, always getting in fights and everything.

BP: [laughs] Oh they were rough as cobs! These guys fought all the time and if they couldn't find someone to beat up, they'd beat up each other. And they actually did that at least once I know about. Paul Burlison would lock 'em in a room and they'd go at each other. They were both boxers. One time we did a show uptown at the Malco Theater with Carl Perkins and his band, and Warren Smith, Roy Orbison, and myself. So Johnny and Dorsey came up up there and wanted to be on the show, and they wouldn't let 'em, so [Johnny & Dorsey] were going to beat up Roy Orbison. [laughs] I stood in front of Roy Orbison and said, "You'll have to go through me first." And I did weigh but ninety pounds at the time. Carl heard about it and came running down and threw them out of the theater, he and his band. He had a pretty rough band, Carl was pretty rough himself in those days, and Clayton - he was a wild man.

BQ: I spoke to Billy Burnette recently.

BP: I've known him since he was ten years old. I used to tell him, "I'm waiting for you to grow up." [laughs] He's just like Dorsey and Johnny. He'll never give up. I was with Johnny four days before he died. He came by my apartment in Hollywood and said, "I'm going to take a few days off and go

fishing.” He looked tired. He’d just done “Big, Big World” and he was working on an album on top of that, and he said, “I’m just beat and I’m going to take a few days and go up near San Francisco and do some fishing.” That’s when the accident happened. He left me and said, “I’ll see you girl, when I get back.” He called me “girl.” They didn’t find Johnny for a week and that tore me all to pieces. But Johnny was a heavy drinker and I told him, “Don’t get in that boat and drink. Scotch and water only mixes in a glass.” He was drinking and he was out on that fiberglass boat when they hit him. I miss him. He had the prettiest blue eyes. He was the most soulful man in the world. He grew up. Dorsey never did. I think Dorsey would’ve tried to beat somebody up at ninety if he had lived that long. God, I miss those guys.

BQ: Billy told me that his dad and uncle grew up in a very tough area. What was so tough about that area that you guys grew up in?

BP: The mean streets of North Memphis. Well, it was poverty stricken for one thing. There were neighborhood gangs and they had rumbles. They didn’t have guns like they do now, but they had knives and beer can openers and things like that. It’s just that everybody was broke and poor, and nobody had anything to do but get out on the streets and look for something to get into. The 50s were a very poor time in this city. Even the middle and upper class types were hurting. People like us - I lived in the projects and Dorsey and Johnny lived right around the corner - didn’t have anything to do. So people would try to make a little excitement happen. There were fights and sometimes you’d find a guy dead the next day. It was *West Side Story* in the South.

BQ: Some of you got out of that environment.

BP: All the music people did - and there were a lot of ‘em. My God, it was almost as if in the 30s and 40s, they set ‘em all down in Memphis when they were born, And they all made it out of there. Every one of them. I don’t know of anybody who was into music in that neighborhood who didn’t get out of there.

BQ: But they carried a lot of their problems with them, didn’t they?

BP: Absolutely. It never went away. It’s such a

deep thing. It was such a horrible existence.

BQ: How did all the legendary performers at Sun accept you?

BP: Pretty well, but I was just a little girl to them. They didn’t really think of me one way or the other. It was “Hello Barbara” when I was around, and that was it. They knew who I was. Johnny Cash used to come over to my house looking for work. Of course, I didn’t have any either so I couldn’t help him.

BQ: What kind of work was he looking for?

BP: Singing. He was trying to get into the scene that was going on in Memphis at the time.

BQ: Was this before he signed with Sun?

BP: No, he was with Sun then. I used to work with Johnny at a place called the Goodwin Institute. We put on little shows up there every week and he’d sing like Ernest Tubb.

BQ: Y’know, I’ve heard some tapes of early live shows where he’d do impressions. He could do Hank Snow and Elvis...

BP: He really did sing like Ernest Tubb at the beginning. It was not an impression. Jack Clement finally got a hold of him and got Johnny’s style going for him. Anyway, they all just treated me like a kid, except for Elvis, and Elvis didn’t know what kids were. [laughs]

BQ: Concerning Elvis’ early days, what is it about Elvis that we most often get wrong information about?

BP: Well, he wasn’t shy, and he wasn’t the mama’s boy they often make him out to be. He loved his mother like all Southern men do, y’know. I never seen one that didn’t love their mother more than their father. He really did, he loved his mom - well, we all do. Southern people are very attached to their mothers. But Elvis was headstrong, hot-tempered, and he knew what he wanted and went after it. People should have realized that when they saw him on those big shows at such a young age. Anyone else would have been scared to death and panicked, but he was just as relaxed as if he were in his living room. Elvis knew what he wanted, and Elvis was an imitator. He took a little bit of James Dean, Marlon Brando,

Tony Curtis, Valentino, and Roy Hamilton and a few others and threw it all together, and it came out Elvis. Those were the people he wanted to look like and be like, and he took a little bit of their personalities and sound. And he loved to sing Dean Martin.

BQ: Once Elvis got going as a real hot and heavy rhythm & blues singer, did it strike people as odd that he liked guys like Dean Martin?

BP: Well, that didn't come out at the time. No one really knew about that. I knew about it because I used to go to his house to sing and play the piano with him. His mother used to tell us we looked like brother and sister, then we'd get in a fight! [laughs] He'd look at me and say, "I can't be that ugly, Mom." So I wouldn't take that - I shoot right back, "Well, I certainly don't look like you!" I called him "Bumphead" because he had little knots on his head. We were kids, you know. But he grew into his face and became gorgeous.

BQ: Set us straight on a few things. I've read in some of these books that Elvis wasn't particularly fond of bathing or brushing his teeth.

BP: He had the prettiest teeth I've ever seen in my life. His mother made him take vitamins, brush his teeth, and I never smelled anything but good on him. [laughs] He washed his hair every day - that's the softest, prettiest hair I'd ever seen.

BQ: In the liner notes of the AVI compilation *Sun Rockabillies Vol. 3* it reads, "Barbara Pittman was the official underage hot box of steam at Sun Records. She could growl and purr and shriek with the best of them, and the fact that she was barely in her teens when this stuff was cut makes it all the more amazing. A teenage, pajama-party, gal-pal of Elvis, she got her start with Clyde Leppard's Snearly Ranch boys before moving to California."

BP: So, I'm a "gal pal"? I guess that's a polite way of saying I was sleeping with him? That's just not true. I never had any "pajama parties"

with Elvis because Elvis didn't own any pajamas. [laughs]

BQ: I saw an article on the internet called "*Elvis: Rockin' in the Army*," which says that Elvis had come home on leave from the Army, laid his head on your lap and began crying, "Why me?" Is that true?

BP: Well, he did. We were up in his room, I stayed with him the last night he was home, because Elvis walked in his sleep and couldn't be left alone.

BQ: Really?

BP: Yes. He almost walked off a building in Hawaii one time. It was twenty stories up or something. So he couldn't be left alone, and he was still grieving over his mom. His mom had just died, and he laid his head in my lap and cried, "Why me? I know this is going to be the end of my career. My mom's gone and now my career is going to be gone." And he was just very upset, and I comforted him. That's all there was to it. My brother was in the service but he wasn't giving up anything. As a matter of fact, he was getting three good meals a day that he wasn't getting at home. But with Elvis, I could understand where he was coming even then, and I was just a kid. He was mostly crying about his mom, he knew that everything was turning



Barbara and the Snearly Ranch Boys. Singer Barbara at age seventeen with songwriter/producer Stan Kesler sitting next to her on her left.

completely different from that point on in his life.

BQ: Did you see much of Elvis after the Army years?

BP: Yeah, I saw him for a while and then I went to L.A.; I decided that I was just going to move on with my life. The studio had closed and the music was gone. So I wanted to get into something else - I wanted to be a movie star. [laughs] So I went out to L.A. in '62, and I saw him a few times out there when he was renting Valentino's house. I wanted to see it so I went over. But when he met Priscilla, he was talking about her even then, and he was saying that she looked like a female Valentino. He had this worship - he believed he was the reincarnation of Valentino. At times he would actually talk like he had dreamed he was, at one time or another. Anyway, after that, when she came on the scene, I didn't go around him anymore.

BQ: So basically, early 60s might've been the last time you saw him?

BP: I think it was right before they got married.

BQ: Did Elvis seem to forget a lot of his old friends from Memphis, or was it just a matter of him not running in the same circles anymore?

BP: Well, he had the same old guys he always had around him.

BQ: Did you know those boys, Sonny and Red?

BP: Every one of them, yes. Red went to Humes High. Red was actually his best friend. There's a guy who claims he was, but he wasn't. Red traveled with him during the early days as sort of a bodyguard because everybody kept trying to beat Elvis up. They were very jealous. He stopped to get some gas in Memphis one night and a guy gave him a black eye just on general principle. [laughs]

BQ: As far as you knew, was there any friction between Red West and Elvis' original musicians, Scotty Moore, Bill Black, and D.J. Fontana?

BP: No, Red got along with everybody. Red is a very intelligent man, and he knows when to hold his cards. He wasn't your average country bumpkin like a lot of those guys hanging around Elvis. He did care a lot for Elvis. He even protected him in high school.

Red really loved the guy and the only reason that he wrote the book that he wrote was to try to get Elvis off of drugs. But it looked like a revengeful thing because Elvis had fired Red and his cousin.

BQ: Sometimes they show those old press conferences with the bodyguards and you can tell that Red is really tore up over the whole situation.

BP: Oh yeah, he hated it so bad that Elvis died without knowing that he really sincerely cared for him. He didn't put the book out to make money or get revenge. He was trying to save his life. But the paranoia and jealousy in Elvis was incredible, and it was always there.

BQ: What can you tell me about Bill Black's role in Elvis' original group?

BP: I'll say one thing, Bill was the life of the three of them. Elvis wiggled his legs a little bit, but he was self-conscious at first, and Bill was all over the place. Bill was a star before he was a star. He knew he was a star and he told you he was. I loved Bill Black.

BQ: People close to the situation have told me that Bill Black was angrier with Elvis than he was with Col. Parker over the split.

BP: I believe that. What Bill didn't understand was that Parker was the business man, and he didn't have to deal with him personally. But he was around Elvis all the time. Elvis treated them like they were the underdogs. He said, "I want you and Scotty to go on without me and see what happens." I've heard him say that many times. Then he'd turn around and say, "Aw man, we're a team." "Well, why don't you pay us like a team? I've got kids at home, I can't live off this money." Elvis just wouldn't do it.

BQ: What do you think Elvis wanted? Control of the situation?

BP: Elvis didn't like to hand people money. I know that he never had a dime on him and he was always borrowing money from people. He borrowed \$1.50 from me to go to the Suzore movie theater downtown. He wasn't a star then. He had a date with some girl and I thought he was going to take me and I gave him \$1.50 to go to the movie, and I ended up standing outside the movie while they went in. I was

standing out there, this poor little twelve, thirteen-year-old kid, and I couldn't get in because he took all my money. He never paid me back, incidentally.

BQ: I've been having some problem understanding Scotty Moore's personality.

BP: I have never known Scotty to be anything but just cold and distant. Even with his wife and children. I knew his first wife and, my God, I wouldn't have been married to him for nothin'. My gosh, that's a cold guy.

BQ: By contrast, D.J.'s colorful.

BP: D.J.'s crazy! [laughs] What you see now is the same way he was in 1957. He's hilarious. You can't help but hang around D.J. and have a good time. He's funny, even when he's serious and he doesn't know he's being funny. But he's a lousy drummer! He was booed off stage at the Cotton Club. I got on stage to sing a ballad and by the time I was through, I was singing an up tune, man.

BQ: So, he could only play the fast stuff?

BP: Well, he'd start out slow and he kept building. He kept getting faster and faster and faster. By the end, I was singing "Let Me Go Lover" in triple time.

BQ: Was that a normal part of your repertoire?

BP: "Let Me Go Lover" was the first song I ever sang on stage in my life - Teresa Brewer's version. I did a show one time, this was when Sleepy Eyed John had booked me out at the Eagle's Nest, he was bringing big country shows in here like Kitty Wells, Minnie Pearl, Johnnie & Jack, and Sonny James and they were all on the same show. Well, he'd get me on those shows. Here I was in my teens and looking at twenty-five to thirty thousand people at the auditorium. The first time I was on his show he had Dottie West, Minnie Pearl, Johnnie & Jack, Marty Robbins, and Sonny James. Marty Robbins walked up and said, "Hold my guitar." I said, "OK." Then he said, "But you've got to hold me with it." [laughs] Marty Robbins was a flirt and a half. I went out there and I had this little local band and I did "Let Me Go Lover." I walked out on stage and I was vibrating so hard that I could hardly walk. I was shaking so bad and I stepped on the amplifier chord and ripped it right out. So, I had to stand there while they repaired

that before I could get into my song. By the time I got into my song, I was crying so hard that I brought down the house. [crying and singing] "Oh let me go, let me go, lover..." [laughs] I actually brought down the house.

BQ: Another person I was thinking about speaking with was Eddy Arnold.

BP: I met him at a disc jockey convention in Nashville. I went up there with Bill Justis and Jack Clement. He knew Jack, and when I saw him coming up the street I said, "Oh my God, that's Eddy Arnold." He stopped and said, "Hi Jack, how you doing?" And I'm standing there with my mouth open. It's freezing cold and I've got on this little cocktail dress; we were going around to all the rooms and every one was dressed in evening wear. And Eddy took off his coat and put it around my shoulders as I was standing there talking to him.

BQ: Is that the same time you had that picture taken with Sam Phillips?

BP: The one on the bed? Yeah.

BQ: He was lighting your cigarette?

BP: Oh he wasn't lighting the cigarette. I took the cigarette away from him. He was burning my clothes with it. I had on crinolines under that dress and I didn't want 'em burned. He was drunk and I said, "No, you've got to give me that cigarette because you're burning my clothes." He was grabbing me around the neck and I hated that. I had uncles do that and they mess up your hair and makeup and everything. I didn't care much for Sam.

BQ: You liked Elvis though?

BP: Oh yeah. We were like brother and sister. We'd touch our fingers together and we'd shock each other all the time. He did that in front of the Wilburn Brothers one time, and I ran into the ladies room and wouldn't come out. They were flirting with me and Elvis came out and said, "This is my girl, you don't flirt with my girl."

BQ: Did you know Jerry Lee Lewis before he became a star?

BP: Absolutely. Jack Clement brought him over to the Cotton Club and was trying to get him work



Jerry Lee Lewis with Barbara's future ex-husband Willi Gutt, 1982.

and he's just not anywhere near as good as he used to be. I went to his birthday party and I was shocked. His voice was real weak.

BQ: Do you think he'll ever start taking care of himself?

BP: That's the problem, he is straight now. He is eating the right foods, getting rest, and he's staying home and trying to do right. But he waited until too late. He abused his body all these years just horribly. He almost died twice, and now that it's finally soaked into that head of his that he's killing himself, the damage has already been done. The man just looks awful.

because he was here with his wife and kids. He was right out of Louisiana and was broke. They actually booed him off the stage over there. He wasn't that good then, and Smokey Joe was real popular with the crowds at the Cotton Club. They didn't want Jerry Lee up there, they wanted Smokey back. His piano playing really wasn't that great in those days.

BQ: That was around '56?

BP: Yes.

BQ: Did the people at Sun know anything about his marriage to Myra before it happened?

BP: Yes. I tried to talk him out of marrying his cousin. I knew the night before that he was going to do it. He got in Sam's car one night and drove me home from Phillip's International and I tried my best to talk him out of it and he just wouldn't listen. I said, "Y'know, you've got a wonderful career going for you. Don't do that, it's just going to ruin everything." And I was absolutely right. He had a lot of talent but no sense in his head. The man is just completely out of control. You can't tell Jerry anything.

BQ: Does that hold true today?

BP: Well, he's just an old sick man. He is not well and he's trying to keep himself clean but he's weak,

BQ: Let's get into your singing career at Sun.

BP: Well, Elvis had introduced me to Sam Phillips, and I went down and did an audition for him. He told me to go out and learn how to sing and then come back. Now, Marion Keisker, who didn't want any women in that studio at all, told me to go out and learn how to type or get married because I couldn't sing. I hadn't been singing very long. God, I was just a little kid. So I went back and made a demo for Elvis called "Playing For Keeps," something Stanley Kesler had written.

BQ: I like that song. [Elvis recorded it for RCA in 1957.]

BP: Well now, Elvis even said himself that he recorded it because I sang it better than he did. He actually made that statement, and he went on to record a lot of other stuff he'd heard me sing, [laughs] because he said I sang it better than he did.

BQ: Wow!

BP: Yeah, that's quite a compliment. Especially "Cold, Cold Heart," Elvis said I was the only one he ever heard who could really sing that song. That really just made me feel so good, and in my heart I feel that was the best thing I did. Bill Justis did

the engineering and he came out into the studio crying when we finished the thing. He just loved it so much. He was quite a character, I love Bill Justis. But anyway, I went back with the demo, which we made at the Cotton Club in West Memphis, and Sam listened to it and he didn't realize that I was that same girl that had auditioned a year earlier. He said, "Hey, who is this? This sounds real good and I'd like to get her in here and do some things." "Well, that's Barbara Pittman!" And Sam said, "Well, I guess she did what I told her to." But Sam never did think I could sing. He never thought Charlie Rich could sing.

BQ: Well, that's certainly not the consensus today.

BP: He thought Charlie was bad; he thought I was bad, and [laughs] he didn't think Roy Orbison was worth a darn either.

BQ: That's pretty far off the mark, I'd say. How did Phillips get this reputation as this guy with an unerring gift for finding great talent?

BP: Well...everybody else did the work and Sam took the bows. Jack Clement was there, and he discovered Jerry Lee Lewis. I guess Carl Perkins is the only one that Sam really "discovered" that did anything on that label. The rest of it was Jack Clement and Bill Justis and the other people that were working in that studio, and Sam took the bows. And even today, certain people that were there then will tell you the same thing.

BQ: Other than owning the label, what was Sam's contribution then? Was it as an engineer?

BP: Not really, though Sam was an engineer. Mostly he liked radio stations. He would take his equipment up to the Peabody and broadcast the music of the big bands from up there. As far as being a studio engineer? Naw, he wasn't that good of an engineer. He didn't work much there. The only time I saw Sam was in the evening when he, Jack Daniels, and Haig & Haig were together. [laughs]

BQ: I don't think many people know how important Jack Clement was at Sun.

BP: Well, he *was* the Sun Studio. That's why Sam fired him. When he left in '57, it just started going down to nothing. Jack's departure was the death of

the Sun Studio. He left with Bill Justis and Johnny Cash, and they all went to Nashville and that was the end of it.

BQ: They hung on for a few years.

BP: Yes, but mostly they were recording at Phillips International and no one knew what they were doing there with new equipment, which they never could quite get to work. I did my last session there - "Handsome Man" and "The Eleventh Commandment."

BQ: Tell us about your time with Clyde Leppard & His Snearly Ranch boys.

BP: When I came off the road with Lash Larue, I think I met Stanley [Kesler] at one of those little shows at the Goodwin Institute. Warren Smith was working at the Cotton Club and I got his job. [chuckles] Poor ol' Warren, they fired him and hired me. I didn't know it at the time, because I just thought the world of Warren Smith. He was just a good friend, a dear friend.

BQ: I think he was a major talent. [Warren Smith is one of this writer's favorite Sun artists.]

BP: Had he gone into country sooner than he did, he would've been a huge artist. So, I worked with Clyde Leppard for about a year, and then someone came in and did the same thing to me.

BQ: Did you sing country music with them?

BP: Oh no, I was doing Little Richard and all the rhythm & blues artists. I was doing "Kansas City," "Long Tall Sally," and all of Little Richard's stuff; Dinah Washington and - practically everything I did was from black artists.

BQ: You mentioned Smokey Joe Baugh earlier. Tell us a little about Smokey Joe. I thought this guy was great.

BP: He's one of the best piano players I've ever heard.

BQ: He had that real unusual voice which made him sound like a true blues growler.

BP: Yes, it was from an accident that happened to him when he was a kid. He had swallowed some lye and it damaged his vocal chords and it came out

all bluesy. Every time I'd walk in he'd say, [growling low] "Hey Barbara. Let's get Barbara up here." I just loved Smokey and he could sing the blues.

BQ: Smokey Joe played on your first record "I Need A Man" and "No Matter Who's To Blame"?

BP: Oh yes.

BQ: Even today, "I Need A Man" is a bold and forceful record; back then it must've sounded positively lascivious! And you were still a teenager. How did your mother react when she heard this?

BP: She locked me in the closet for a week. [laughs] She said, "You can't go out. Just forget it." Y'know, I looked so much older than my years because I was born with a training bra on. She was worried about me, but I was a good kid and she knew it, really.

BQ: So what did the guys think after you cut this? I'm sure you got some, shall we say, offers.

BP: Well, I was so young and standoffish, I was scared of my own shadow. I was really a shy kid; I was shaking so hard that when I'd get around Elvis he'd call me his vibrator. "Hey, my back hurts, lean up against me." Mostly, I was kind of a loner and I'd go right home. The band would take me home and pick me up, and Dewey [Phillips] was real protective of me too. Jack Clement and I dated - we were pretty close, and Elvis and I were close friends, but we were never really what you'd call lovers. We dated and everything, but I just wasn't his type. Actually, we weren't each other's type because we were just way too much alike. We looked quite a bit alike and we clashed temperamentally. We were subject to knock the heck out of each other. [laughs]

BQ: [laughing] As only really good friends are prone to do.

BP: That's right, "I gave you a bloody nose because I love you." [laughs] But anyway, I didn't really have any problems. Guys were different in those days than they are now. They didn't come on as strong with girls as they do these days, and if you acted shy and respectful, well [laughs] they didn't have time to bother with that. They just moved on to the next one.

BQ: I've read that "Handsome Man" was the most expensive record ever made at Sun. What made it so costly?

BP: Well...that was the last record I recorded, and Charlie Rich wrote it and played piano on it. We had a vocal group there, and all the strings and all the basic instruments plus guitars. Everything happened in that studio, nothing was overdubbed. They were all union musicians charging union scale, and it was going on all night long. Charlie Underwood, who wrote the other side of that record, "The Eleventh Commandment," was engineering, and he was the one who put this thing together. Sam was at home in bed with pneumonia. When somebody called him and told him what was going on, he got out of bed and came down during a blizzard [laughing] to find out what in the heck was going on.

BQ: Did he just send everybody home?

BP: No, it was too late; we'd been there for hours. So we had to finish it up.

BQ: What was Charlie Rich like on this session?

BP: Charlie, y'know, kinda tilted the bottle a little. Well, a lot actually, and he was pretty well gone. We were just singing away and the vocal group was doing their "ooh wahs" and the violins were going - suddenly we missed the piano and Charlie. There was a hole in everything and we looked at the piano for Charlie and he was under it! [laughing] He was under it. He was out, sitting there with his head resting against the piano bench. We got him awake and we went on with the session.

BQ: I've read that the session cost \$5000.

BP: Oh, at least! The most expensive session Sam ever had. That's including Elvis, Jerry Lee, Carl, any of 'em. Sam just didn't believe in paying his artists. He paid Charlie Rich fifty dollars a week as a studio musician.

BQ: That seems to be the case with most record companies back there. They did everything they could to get out of paying what they owed.

BP: We were actually told, "Don't ever expect your royalties to help you, because you're not getting any." Not only that, but he would do some strange things, like when "I'm Getting Better All The Time"

was hitting in Chicago, which was the toughest market we had at that time, he took it off. He had Jud Phillips stop promoting it, saying, “No. Pull it.” And it was breaking, it was selling. It was really going up the charts; it had a bullet and everything.

BQ: Did Sam Phillips ever offer a reason for that?

BP: He never explained it. I think it was because he was jealous of Jack Clement, and Jack’s tune was on the other side. He was showing Jack that this was his label, and he’s not going to get away with anything because, “I’m going to tell you what to do.” At my expense. And he did the same thing to Billy Lee. Other recording companies wanted to buy my recording contract from Sam, and he wouldn’t sell it. He wasn’t promoting my records, was pulling the hits off the market, and then he wouldn’t sell my contract.

BQ: “I’m Gettin’ Better All the Time” was another bold, sexy record.

BP: Well, I think Stanley Kesler must’ve had a private thing for me because all the songs he wrote were in that vein. [laughs]

BQ: Was it difficult being the only female artist at Sun Records?

BP: It was very difficult because no one took me seriously. It was a man’s world, and here was this girl. And, I wasn’t doing Connie Francis, I was really doing a kind of blues thing. This strong-voiced growling girl. Connie Francis was out there singing “Lipstick On Your Collar,” and I was here screaming “I Need A Man.” So, if it wasn’t for Dewey Phillips, I don’t think I would’ve got anywhere at all. He really believed in me and helped me out quite a bit. But it wasn’t easy.

BQ: I get the feeling that because I didn’t grow up listening to Dewey Phillips’ *Red, Hot, & Blue* that I really missed out on something. What can you tell us about him?

BP: Well, Dewey was a natural. He was a crazy man and I mean literally. He was absolutely crazy. All these guys, [laughing] Jack Daniels was their favorite friend. I hate to say it, but it was true. Sam and Dewey would get together down at the Sun

studios and erase some wonderful masters that we did. There’s no telling how much stuff they erased. They’d try to put it on playback and accidentally put it on erase.

BQ: Oh no!

BP: Yes, I did a thing called “Titles Will Tell.” I did a beautiful job on that, and Dewey just loved it, and he played it over and over and ended up erasing the darn thing. So, there’s no telling what stuff by Elvis or whoever was erased that way.

BQ: So, it’s a wonder that as much stuff survived as it did?

BP: It really is, I’m telling you. Dewey was a character, but he was also his own worst enemy. Dewey could’ve been as big as Wolfman Jack; he had offers from all over the country. He wouldn’t take them; he wanted to stay here.

BQ: There’s this disc of Dewey Phillips airchecks out on Memphis Archives. He’s the most amazing disc jockey I ever heard. I would’ve listened to him even if he didn’t play music.

BP: Yeah! Everybody, when Dewey would come on, would too. Because you never knew what this man was going to say next! And you never knew who was going to walk in that door. It was open house at the Chisca. Anybody could walk in and get on the air. He had me do Elizabeth Taylor one night. They were filming a movie down in Mississippi, and he had me pretend I was Elizabeth Taylor.

BQ: How’d that go over?

BP: Well, they were stampeding the mezzanine floor. I just walked out, “Hi, y’all!” and left! [laughs] That was the kind of stuff he would do, you never knew what he would do next. He was such a sad person in his personal life, which was really contradictory. But when he was on the air he was *Dewey* !

BQ: He was an enormous influence on the Memphis scene, wasn’t he?

BP: Yes, he was. He was the first one to break Elvis’s record, and he broke my record for me. He almost made “Two Young Fools” a hit, and he played Sun stuff that no one else would play when they thought it sounded too black.

BQ: Did you take a lot of guff over sounding black?

BP: Oh yeah.

BQ: From people in the business?

BP: Oh no, it was mostly in the clubs that people would make their little snide remarks. Of course, I was a mean kid. I grew up in North Memphis. I was shy and standoffish until you got me mad.

BQ: Tell me about the photo of you and Sam Phillips on AVI's *Sun Rockabilles Vol. 3*.

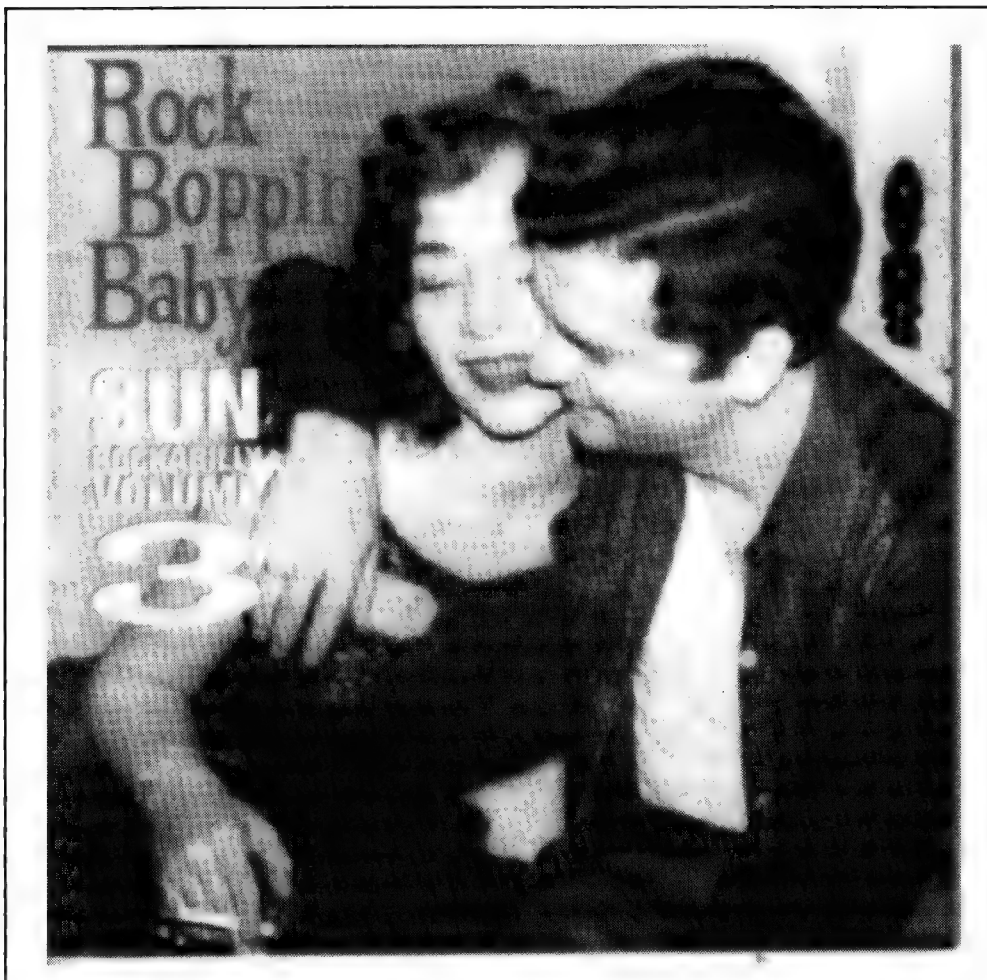
BP: That was taken in Nashville, at the disc jockey convention. Sam's wife was there; Jack Clement was standing there. I took the cigarette out of Sam's hand because he was going to burn my sequined dress. You could see from the picture that Sam was having a good time. I took the cigarette out of his hand and was holding it when the guy took the picture, and Sam had his arm around my neck.

BQ: The picture looks like someone caught the two of you in a hotel room.

BP: Yeah, I know. You oughta see the other one I haven't let anybody see, [laughs] I'm sitting on the bed and Sam's telling me how beautiful my legs are. So people everywhere have mentioned that picture, but it was very innocent, but it doesn't look that way. Sam looks half-drunk with his hair in his face and his shirt open, [drunk voice] "How ya doin' there shweetheart? Hic."

BQ: Was Sam Phillips capable of handling more than one or two artists at a time?

BP: No, I don't think so. Financially, he could've handled what he was putting out, but he wouldn't spend any money on his artists. Sam's ambition



The cover of *Rock Boppin' Baby* with Barbara Pittman and Sam Phillips.

was to make enough money to buy a radio station, which is what he wanted. He wanted an all-girl radio station, which he accomplished. That was his whole ambition; he cared nothing about recording artists. He thought we were all a bunch of idiots. He and Elvis were not close, and he was very jealous of all the guys. But Sam just wasn't interested in what he was doing. You hear him tell it now, and he was a big innovator and knew this was going to be great and blah, blah, blah. That's just not true, that stuff. Sam was interested in one thing and that was buying radio stations.

BQ: Didn't he also invest in the Holiday Inn chain?

BP: He got in with Kemmons Wilson on that, but he didn't stick with it for very long. I think he had some money on it. As a matter of fact, I think that's one of the reasons he sold the catalog to Shelby Singleton.

BQ: Did you write your own material or pick your own songs at Sun?

BP: I wasn't allowed to. The material I got was what everybody else turned down. Except for "I Need A Man," which I wrote with Stanley. It was Stanley's scenario to begin with, but I added lines like "There's just one thing that I can't see, there's a world full of men but there's none for me." [laughs] That was my contribution. Y'know, I hated that song forever. I hated it when it came out. I just thought that was a horrible sounding thing. It was out of meter. Y'know, Clyde Leppard was not a good drummer. He would slow down and pickup, slow down and pick up. I just hated that. Here I am forty years later, and I can't go to Europe unless I sing that.

BQ: On your other records you worked with the best drummer at Sun, J.M. Van Eaton.

BP: Oh yeah. He was on "I'm Gettin' Better All The Time," "Everlasting Love"; he was on just about all of them, except the first.

BQ: So you didn't see any promotion at Sun other than what you could generate yourself?

BP: That's it, things I could do myself. I did go on the bus with Jerry Lee and all of them, including one show when we did a benefit for Carl Perkins' brother, who had a brain tumor. And I did a watermelon festival with them one time. For everything else, I was out getting my own things. Which wasn't easy because girls, at that time, they wouldn't even listen to you. It was just very difficult. It still is, but not as bad as it was then.

BQ: How do you feel about your Sun and Phillips sides being in constant reissue throughout the years?

BP: I don't mind it. At least it gave me some publicity to the point where I was getting work and touring Europe. Suddenly I was discovered. [laughs] It took me forty years before people started saying, "What about this one female artist on this label?" I've been to Europe a few times and just had a ball! They treat you like royalty over there. I just love going over there.

BQ: What songs do you do for them when you go overseas?

BP: I do all my Sun material and everybody else's. I do Jerry Lee's tunes, and Charlie Rich's "Lonely Weekends," and Elvis, a full hour. I'll always go three days before the show. A lot of people will go over there to do a show and come back; I won't do that. I only demand one thing, and that's rehearsal. The first time I was over there, I was in England. I walked off the plane, got in the car, drove to Birmingham, and went out on the stage. With no rehearsal, nothing, and it was the worst show I ever heard. It was horrible. Ted Mack would've thrown me off the stage. I said, "This is it! I'm going to have rehearsal before I do this again. Even if it's just an hour or two hours before we go on."

BQ: You've got to go over the changes?

BP: Right, and get your keys. Sometimes they tune differently over there than we do here. It's just different, sometimes you have to drop down half a note or bring it up a half a note. I've gone back several times. Like I was in Switzerland a couple of years ago, and I had a wonderful time. I was there for eight days for one show, and it was the greatest time in the world. I went to Lucerne and Zurich. I was a tourist more than I was an act. It was wonderful.

BQ: Did you have a hard time getting Sam Phillips to release your records during your four-year stay at Sun?

BP: It was a battle all the time, but I had a contract and he was committed to giving me x-amount of records. Which he did, and nothing more. Everybody else went in there all the time and doing albums and everything else, but I did exactly what I was signed to do in my contract and that was it. I did demos for people in there. The Bear Family album has everything I recorded including the demos, "Just One Day," "Sentimental Fool," and all these things were demos that I considered recording but changed my mind and did something else. I remember Lieber and Stoller came down from New York, and they had this tune for me and I recorded it; and it's on the Bear Family album, the one I was going to do instead of "Two Young Fools In Love." It's not "Voice Of A Fool." Everything I did had "Fool" in it I believe. [laughs] But Jack wanted me to do his tune, so I did his.

BQ: What was Billy Lee Riley like back in the Sun days?

BP: [laughs] Billy Lee was a crazy man! And every time I'd see him he'd have something broken. He'd swing from chandeliers and bounce off the wall if he could. I have never seen anything like him; he was always breaking something. I guess he didn't realize that he was jumping from so high. He was enthusiastic, but he was clumsy. He was wild!

BQ: What was Roland Janes like back then?

BP: Roland was just starting out. He actually engineered "Two You Fools In Love." It was his first time as an engineer, and he forgot to put the echo on it. Y'see, Jack Clement played that beautiful little guitar on it. That's just my voice; and Jack, that's all you'll hear. So Roland forgot to put on the echo, but it turned out so good that they decided not to put on any echo at all.

BQ: That was a good record on you.

BP: Thank you very much, I think it was one of the better ones. It sold a lot of records in this area.

BQ: Do you prefer the give and take of a live audience?

BP: Oh yeah. I used to do two clubs a night out in California. I'd work one club then run to another club and do a show, then run back and do the last show at the first one. Loved it! Had a ball. I was a kid, just a beach bunny who went to the beach every day in my little bikini and just having myself a ball.

BQ: Tell us about some of the movies you did out in California.

BP: I was in some motorcycle movies. There was *Wild On Wheels*. I did soundtrack work for *The Hell's Angels*; I sing the theme on that one.

BQ: I don't think I've heard that one, are you rockin' on it?

BP: Oh yeah, and I sing all the parts. You know I love to overdub my voice and sing harmony with myself, and I do like six voices on that thing. Harley Hatcher wrote the song; and we went down to the NBC studio one night and I learned it and recorded the whole thing within three hours. My reward was a part in the movie. [laughs] Most of 'em I didn't have

any speaking parts.

BQ: What about *Dr. Goldfoot and The Girl Bomb*?

BP: I did the theme from that, "Makin' Love Is Fun." [joking] There I go again...people keep handing me that stuff. I think that's been my downfall all my life.

BQ: Have you ever been watching cable one night, switching through the dials, and said, "Hey, I'm in this movie"?

BP: I caught the *Wild Angels* one night, but I think they edited me out. I didn't see me anywhere, and I've got it on tape.

BQ: Did you do much TV out there in California?

BP: I did the *Sammy Masters Show* with Glen Campbell. Dorsey Burnette got me on there.

BQ: So you saw the Burnette Brothers out in California?

BP: Oh gosh yes, they helped me out quite a bit. They were trying to get me on labels and everything. Then Johnny got killed and everything just stopped. That was the saddest day of my life. [Johnny Burnette died in a boating mishap in 1964.] But they were real good friends; Dorsey was very helpful to me. He got me going when I got out there.

BQ: Were you able to stay in touch with Dorsey through they years until his passing?

BP: No. When I left California in 1970, we lost touch. [Dorsey died in 1979.]

BQ: Were you working steady out there?

BP: Oh yeah, I was singing all the time. I had a band full of jazz musicians playing rock, and we just did everything. I worked with them for three solid years. Then I was working here and there with other groups, and I entertained on cruise ships to Acapulco quite a bit. I was on the ship that premiered *The Valley of the Dolls*, the *Princess Italia*. It was a beautiful ship, and I sang with Italians there. They couldn't speak a word of English, but they sure could play rock'n'roll - when they weren't pinching you. [laughs] Oh my goodness, you couldn't turn your

back on those guys, not even at rehearsal.

BQ: What happened to your recording career when you were out in California?

BP: I was signed to Mike Curb for four years, and we did some things that were released but nothing ever happened. He wanted me to stay with vocal groups, not record by myself. We did soundtracks for the movies and the only solo thing I did was "You Really Got A Hold On Me." I just couldn't get it clicking out there for some reason.

BQ: Mike Curb ended up being an industry giant, didn't he?

BP: Oh gosh, yes! Well, I knew that was going to happen. Here's a guy who was head of MGM when he was twenty-one. I met him when he was like nineteen, when he was first starting out, running around trying to sell his tunes. Eventually he became Lt. Governor of California. He came from a wealthy family, and he just got what he wanted when he wanted it.

BQ: Are there any other labels you were with that we don't know about?

BP: I was signed to a label, the same label that Ritchie Valens was on: DelFi. The guy brought me in, signed me up; and Dorsey was trying to help me get some tunes together, and it just never did happen. It was the weirdest thing. I finally wanted out of the contract because after seven or eight months we still hadn't done anything. The guy told Dorsey, "If I had even given her a nickel, any money at all, I wouldn't let her out of the contract; but since there's no money spent she can go." For some reason or other we just couldn't get anything going. Dorsey was bringing me tunes that just weren't my style, and I couldn't make him understand that I don't do those folksy, "Tall-Oak-Tree"-type songs. That's the kind of stuff he kept bringing me. "The Rain's Came Down" and that kind of stuff. I wanted something gutsy and bluesy and rock'n'roll. But that's where Dorsey's mind was, plus he wanted me to do his tunes - he was insisting on it. So we could just never get together on it. Which is a shame, because I think it would've been good for me.

BQ: Did you deal with Bob Keene at DelFi?

BP: Yes. It hadn't been too long; he was still

grieving over Ritchie Valens. This was in the early 60s.

BQ: That's too bad nothing came of the DelFi. Do you think that in situations where the man and the label are one, the artists are more at the mercy of the owner's whims?

BP: That's it. Absolutely, and I've fallen into that all of my life. I'd give anything in the world if I could go into a studio and not one person owned it. I had that with Mike and Sam and the guy at DelFi; it just seems to be the way it's always been. Because they're not going to let you do what you want to do.

BQ: Well, let's talk about that. What do you want to do?

BP: I want to sing rock'n'roll and blues! That's what I do best; I'm not a rockabilly singer. I don't mind doing it, but I don't want to go out and sing "Be-Bop A Hip-Hop At The Hip-Hop" anymore. [laughs] I'm too damned old to be at the hop! I'd have to crawl to the hop. But I never did sing those type of lyrics though.

BQ: Do you think you'd like to go the route of some of these new acts, and possibly put stuff out on your own label and then find a distributor?

BP: I think that would be a great idea. I'm working with some people right now that it might happen with. I don't want to give too many details right now because it's still in the talking stage. But if it turns out, it'll be just what I've been looking for all my life.

BQ: Do you have any unreleased material that we should know about?

BP: I produced my own album a few years ago, but I'm not happy with it. It didn't come out the way I wanted it to. It's one of those little garage studio type of things. You know, "cheap cheap" like a little bird, but the sound and voice didn't come out the way I wanted. Men who are musicians as well as engineers have a tendency to put the instruments in front of the voice. And every time I told this guy, "I want you to bring my voice up; I don't want to sing background to the instruments." Instead of bringing my voice up, this guy would put more echo or reverb on there. It made me sound like I was singing in a hall. So, it

needs to be remixed and redone. There's some great tunes on there.

BQ: You seemed to have faced a lot of frustration. Was there ever a point where you decided that a career in showbiz just wasn't worth the sacrifices?

BP: Never! That's all I've ever wanted in my life. I was singing at three-years-old. I grew up on Beale Street. I saw Elvis go over; and I was around entertainers, and they were sort of my family. It seemed like when I was around musicians, I was around more of a family than I had at home. Because they understood me and I loved what they were doing. When I would go home it was just hard poverty. Then I'd get around music and musicians and I'm come alive with it. I felt good around it. I have never once in my life thought of getting out of music. As a matter of fact, I told Bill Black's brother Johnny Black, who asked me, "What are you going to do when you get too old for all this and nobody wants you?" I said, "If they stop wanting me I'll go home to my piano and sing for myself." Because I just love it. I love the people, I love the industry; and when there's a good audience out there, it beats any food you could possibly put in your mouth. It's just fantastic.

BQ: Could you have gone into country music like so many former Sun artists did?

BP: Oh, of course. I sing some country; it's just that I couldn't get anyone to get past my being a girl. It was just that little three strikes against you when you walk in the door. I never was one to push myself. I'd get these managers that would call me and say, "Hey, how would you like to go to New York?" Then call the next day and say, "How'd you like to go to California?" Then I'd finally get tired of nothing happening, and I'd go out and get my own thing and they'd want a percentage of it. It was that kind of thing, and no one ever promoted me. I guess I just got lost in the shuffle along the way. But I never stopped working, I was always out there, and I seem to have a lot of respect from my peers. The people I worked with in California, they still keep in touch after all these years that I've been gone.

BQ: So when did you go home to Memphis?

BP: 1970. Worst mistake I ever made in my life.

BQ: Why's that?

BP: Well, you know everybody was talking about how the music industry was booming here, y'know. "Get back to Memphis! Be a big fish in a little pond. Go back! The music's booming. There's companies all over the place and everybody's recording!" I stepped off the plane and the ground was shaking from people leaving town! [laughs] I heard an earthquake and there was just people leaving. Stax had fallen in that scandal, this was gone and that was gone, and there wasn't a thing to do here anymore. It was just a big mistake, I had left a great life and great things to do to come back to nothing, and it's been about like that ever since.

BQ: Have you been struggling over these last two decades?

BP: Well, I got married in 1980 and I moved to Houston, [laughs] which was another bad mistake.

BQ: They had a scene down there, didn't they?

BP: Not then. [laughs] I always go when it's over. By then I came back to Memphis and I've done a few things. I married a guy from Europe, and he knew some people and I started going over to Europe. Well, they found me actually. They didn't know where I was, and nobody would tell 'em for some reason.

BQ: [laughs] They wouldn't tell 'em?

BP: No they wouldn't. Stanley Kesler even told one guy in Chicago that I died. I came back, and a guy turned white when he saw me and said, "Barbara Pittman, I heard you died!" [laughs] I said, "Well, that was *highly* exaggerated." That actually happened, there were a lot of people who had thought I died.

BQ: Well, let's tell the world - Barbara Pittman is not dead!

BP: I think that news might disappoint a few of 'em.

BQ: Are you hard to work with?

BP: On no! I respect musicians especially. When I was a kid, if they were two years older than me, I thought they knew more than I would ever learn in my life. I never caused anybody any trouble. I just love the music, and when I'm there, I'm *working*!

I'm the type that will stay there all night and all day if that's what they wanted me to do.

BQ: Tommie Wix told me you had a few words to say about working with the Dave Travis band.

BP: I worked with Dave Travis in Holland. I was there with Eddie Bond. I don't know why, but he and Eddie Bond got together and decided they were going to show me up on stage. And I got a standing ovation and Travis just walked off the stage because he hadn't wanted to play behind me, and he and Eddie Bond were real good friends. It was just one of those things, and I had never met the man before in my life. Then he decided he wanted to collect my royalties for me in England; and my husband at the time talked me into letting Travis collect my royalties, and he's been cheating me just like he did Billy Lee Riley! Here we go again, my royalties are gone again.

BQ: Have you ever gotten a royalty statement for your Sun work?

BP: I've gotten a little bit from Shelby Singleton.

BQ: Have the reissues sold better than the first releases?

BP: Oh much more. A lot of those original releases didn't sell at all. "I Need A Man" - I think I bought a box and passed 'em out. [laughs] It didn't sell anything. It got airplay because Dewey was helping out, but it didn't sell.

BQ: Did you ever see a BMI check for co-writing the song?

BP: I do now, but not then; but you see, the song was going out of copyright, and Stanley Kesler wasn't taking care of it, so I put it on my publishing company and put my name down as writer. So I've got all the writer's end of it now. For years, I never saw a dime. And you know, together Jack Clement and I wrote "The Return Of Jerry Lee," and my name is on some records, others it's not. I never received a penny for it, and that sold a lot of records.

BQ: I didn't know you were partly responsible for that. Did that turn out the way you wanted it to and help diffuse the furor over his marriage to Myra Gale?

BP: It was just a comedy thing, where he came back from Europe and we used bits of his records to respond to the way he was treated, and what happened over there. I thought it was hilarious at the time. When I think about it now, it was kind of insulting, nasty, and not in good taste at all.

BQ: Do you ever see people like Jack Clement or Sam Phillips anymore?

BP: Well, I don't see Sam much anymore because I got on the air one night with my husband, who was a disc jockey at one of the local public radio stations, and I told everything. [laughs] Sam was listening to the show. I told how Elvis used to say, "Let's go over to Sam's and visit my money." We were laughing and cutting up but Sam didn't think it was funny. So he has not spoken to me since, and that's been about ten years.

BQ: Is the Memphis scene on the way back?

BP: No, not really, but they're trying. Memphis has a bad habit of destroying everything it starts. It never finishes anything, and that old Memphis syndrome is still here. I call it "The Memphis Stars." Everybody here is a star. Even people who are not even in the industry. The press took a picture of a guy putting up lights to the festival, and now he's got an unlisted number. [laughs] I'm not kidding. Everybody here's a star. You have a hard time getting recording sessions together, or getting guys together to work in clubs because they don't want to back you; they want to be the star. That's the beast that keeps everything down here. For one thing, I think these types are seriously afraid of accomplishing anything where they might have to get off their apathetic butts and do something. Then, they don't want to see anybody else do anything because it would make them look bad. So, it's just one of those nit-picking, back-biting, small-town things that goes on constantly, and it's just enough to keep from getting anything going.

BQ: How do you feel about the phrase rockabilly?

BP: That was a New York thing. They were jealous when we started taking sales away from people like Eddie Fisher and Perry Como, so they called us rockabilly. It was just another way to dismiss us all as hillbillies. I never knew a hillbilly in my life. I

knew a lot of rednecks.

BQ: Is the sound still good there?

BP: Finest musicians in the world, just like they always were. The sound is still here and so is the feeling. But it can't be like it was originally, because we were brand new. We were the inventors of that music. We were the ones that sang it first. So, forty years later, the people that are doing it now are not going to have it sound the way we got it sounding. Because it was this rough diamond, it wasn't even good at times, but it was so new that it made it. Y'know, John Wayne couldn't act, but he was still John Wayne. The kids today, they don't have that kind of devotion here like we did. It may come out after thirteen hours sounding as bad as it did the first cut, but we worked thirteen hours to get it. We were so dedicated and wanted it so bad because every one of us was as poor as a church mouse. Every single person who came to that studio was poor, and music was our way out. But I still do it. I still practice and keep my voice in shape and ready to go, and I keep myself in shape so I can hit that stage and do what I



Barbara Pittman

love to do. And I hope I can keep on doing it until I can't do it anymore.

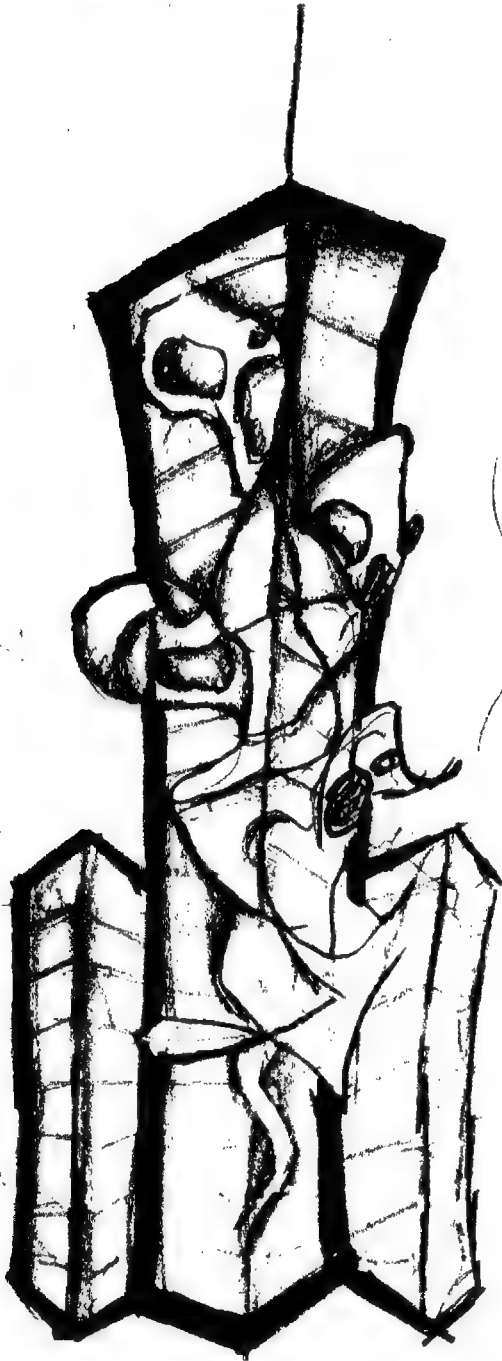
BQ: I'll give you the final word. What would you like to say to all your fans out there?

BP: Tell 'em I've always loved 'em. I love their appreciation for the music and those who like me and my records, and - I'm back, and I'd like to see 'em!

Epilogue. Barbara Pittman lived her final years in public assistance housing after she lost her Memphis home to foreclosure. Her ex-husband Willi Gutt, who publicly referred to himself as Willi Pittman, had taken all of her collectibles and artifacts and donated or sold them to a local museum. What little he kept for himself - vintage pictures, recordings, etc. - ended up in the hands of his next wife after he died. A victim of bad luck and even worse timing, Pittman missed out on a recording deal with NLT in Nashville when the label owner felt the first stings of the record industry collapse. Moreover, the singer's reputation as a hard drinker and difficult personality kept her from fully reigniting her career during the revival years. "Barbara'd make you hold her hand all the way through a project," rockabilly collector/benefactor Tommie Wix once told me, "then she'd turn and get mad at you if the littlest thing didn't work out." Yet she savored the European gigs and festivals that occasionally came her way, and took on any work offered domestically - often working for free when she couldn't afford to feed her dogs. Of the Sun recording artists this writer has interviewed down through the years, I was closest to Barbara Pittman. Our phone rapport was jovial and she seemed to trust me with intimate details of her life. After she told a mutual friend that I had witnessed her last recording session for Sun - a four-year-old at the time, I wouldn't have been allowed out of the house much less a recording session in another state - I knew her health had begun to creep downhill during the summer of 2005. Still, I wasn't prepared for the news that she had collapsed and died at her home on October 9, 2005. We only met in the flesh once, yet I still miss that lady. She wasn't afraid to tell it the way she saw it. Moreover, when all the circumstances were right, she was one fine blue-beltin' mama. R.I.P. Barbara.

GLIMMERS

By Jack Hillman



The silver limo pulled up to the edge of the wide plaza and stopped in front of the building. A puff of cool air escaped the heavily air-conditioned interior as the driver opened the passenger door. The blistering Texas heat caused waves of air to dance above the baked stones of the plaza, surrounding the expensive leather shoes of the passenger with ripples of displaced ether as the cooler leather met the hot stone. The passenger stood straight, ignoring the heat as he looked toward the building.

"Return in three hours," he instructed the driver without looking at him. "I need to be on the other side of town by four o'clock this afternoon."

The driver nodded in response, not speaking, as he had been taught to do by this employer. He moved back to the driver's side, entered the car and started

Illustration by Chelsea Stokes

Stokes!

the engine. Driving off, he left the passenger still looking up at the building.

Richard Raymond Barr enjoyed looking at the imposing structure of steel and glass that rose from the far side of the plaza. The one hundred story structure was one of his crowning accomplishments. It pleased him that only he knew all the secrets hidden in and below this building. With a sigh of contentment, he moved across the plaza, enjoying the click of his metal-capped boots on the glazed stone. The staccato raps sounded like gunshots in the hot air, shots of victory to Barr's way of thinking. Glimmers of light, reflected from the glass and polished steel of the building, danced around his feet and across his body as he moved toward the wide doorway. Occasionally a blaze of light flashed across his eyes, momentarily blinding him and heating his face to a mild burn before his pace carried him out of range of the reflected glare. He enjoyed the minor irritation, a reminder he was not the master of all he surveyed. Yet.

Incentive helped a man succeed, he thought to himself.

"Soon," he heard to his left. He turned slightly, but stopped as a flash of light passed across his dark glasses, blinding him for an instant. The plaza wasn't empty. People were passing into and out of the imposing structure by the dozens. But none were close enough to have spoken to Barr. He shrugged and walked toward the building.

As he passed through the doors into the main lobby, his retinue surrounded him, bombarding him with information. He answered questions in a machine gun fashion a computer would have envied, if it could express the emotion, as he moved across the forty yards of space to his private elevator. By the time the doors closed on the milling mass of people outside the doors, all their questions had been answered, leaving only the three assistants with him in the elevator car. Silent as statues, they awaited his direction.

"Have all the plans for the meeting been finalized?" he asked.

The tall brunette to his left answered, referring to a notebook.

"Dossiers on all the members of the council expected to be in attendance are waiting on your desk, each with a précis of the most pertinent

information. Dossiers on the balance of the council are also prepared should you require them. The city laws have been reviewed and several suggestions for your manner of approach prepared by our legal team. We have been unable to obtain more than an audio link to the meeting site due to some new security arrangement put into place this morning. We expect to be able to have visual link as well for future meetings, but it will take at least another day to make the preparations."

Barr looked down at the tall brunette. "Why were we not aware of the additional security in time to prepare full communications?" he asked quietly.

She withered under his gaze, well aware of the consequences for failure, especially at this level of Barr's organization.

"The building was chosen this morning as the site for the presidential visit next month. Secret Service personnel arrived at dawn to begin the security clearance and sweep the building. We had no way of knowing the city hall was even on the list of meeting sites under consideration since the president just decided he was coming to town yesterday."

Barr looked at her for a moment. Finally he answered. "Acceptable. Barely."

She relaxed perceptibly as sweat broke out on her forehead. Dodging a bullet took on a very personal meaning for Barr's employees.

"Have the plans been finalized for the construction crews?" Barr asked. "I want to break ground in the morning if the meeting goes as planned."

"Ready and waiting on your desk," the stocky young man on Barr's right stated. "We're ready to go as soon as you give the word. Both teams have been prepared and put on call. All we need is your decision as to how you want to handle it."

"Move the union team into position and get them ready to go first thing in the morning," Barr directed. "I'm going to have to soothe a few hotheads this time and throw them a bone with the union scale contract. Send the scab unit over to the construction site for the new free clinic west of town. We can make a few points with the media bringing that job in under budget."

The young man made a note and pulled a cell

phone out of his pocket to follow Barr's orders. The three assistants followed Barr to his office, stopping in the foyer. Barr turned and looked at the third member of the team.

"Make certain the driver knows where the traffic is heaviest today," Barr said. "I can't afford to be late to the meeting. And have the service run a check on three other drivers for me to review by tomorrow. This one's been my driver for a week now. He knows too much of my schedule and activities. Terminate his employment tonight and have the three drivers here first thing in the morning for me to interview."

The wiry man nodded and made his own notes for follow up.

"Call me at quarter to three," he directed to no one in particular as he turned to the door of his office. He waved a hand at the secretary. "And hold my calls." The door to his office closed on the four people with a solid thump of heavy wood.

They all began to breath normally with Barr safely in his sanctum.

Barr moved across the deep carpet of the office with the smooth stride of a carnivore in his prime. He set his briefcase on the wide desk and stood looking out through the glass wall of the office, surveying the city. His city, he thought. Or at least it will be soon. He smiled and sat behind the desk, drawing the files on the committeemen closer for inspection. He knew the information in the files by heart, but it always paid to do a last minute review if he had the time. You never know what bit of information will give you the leverage you need, he thought.

His assistant had done an excellent job with the précis, he noted. He made a mental note to commend her work. Positive and negative reinforcement each had their places, he knew, and he played the balance like a concert violinist. He swung around in his chair as he read the précis, looking out the window over the top of the paper.

A glimmer of light passed through the polarized glass and settled on the back of the paper as he held it steady. As Barr read through the information, the glimmer shrank to a round dot, becoming more intense as it shrank in size. Then, with a flare of heat, the paper in Barr's hand burst into flame, singeing the hair on his hand as

he dropped it on the marble desktop with an oath. He shook his hand to dissipate the heat, watching the paper burn down to ash. The three sheets of paper were not enough to set off the automatic fire alarms, but they were more than enough to get his attention.

Fire his assistant, he thought. And fire whomever the clumsy fool was who ordered office supplies. The flash paper was supposed to be kept separate from the rest of the paper products, to be used only at his direction. On those special documents with deniability requirements.

As Barr sat back at his desk, brushing the ashes of the paper into a wastebasket with casual unconcern and picking up a second file to read, he didn't notice the glimmers of light dancing across the back of his chair and on the floor of the office near the window. His chair shielded him from them, for now.

"Soon," he heard again, and turned toward the window.

It was the same voice. But no one was there. Barr shrugged and turned back to the desk, unaware the dancing lights were leaving lines of soot across the leather chair.

*

"You just wait, Barr" the councilman said in a low voice, heard only by the two men. "You can't blackmail me and get away with it. You'll get yours soon enough."

Barr turned and looked at the man. "But I already have mine, Councilman," he stated calmly, with a smile fitting for a well-fed cat. "And I plan to get more of it."

The councilman stared at Barr for a moment, debating whether to take the challenge to the next level. Then, his judgment telling him to choose another venue, he turned and walked away without further comment. Barr laughed softly as he moved through the crowd at the end of the meeting. Glancing down at his watch, he noted it was still early enough to swing by the new construction site. He walked out to the street.

"Very soon," a voice said in his ear.

He looked left and right, careful that the councilman or one of his "associates" had not caught up with him. Right after one of these meetings was the most dangerous time, Barr knew. The time most likely for an opponent to

take action. But he was alone on the sidewalk, the business crowd gone from their offices for the day and a bit early for the entertainment crowd to start their tour of the nightspots.

He walked the rest of the way to his waiting limo and gave directions to the silent driver as he stepped out of the car and opened the door for Barr.

On the drive to the construction site, Barr reviewed his progress. With the council's support, he would now be able to make use of several other sites for buildings, as he had planned. The hints of substandard materials, and the possible problems with accidents and three deaths on Barr's construction sites, had been swept under the rug, at least for now. He was on a roll, and he knew it. Now was the time to take advantage of the upswing in his level of control.

The limo pulled into the empty lot while the sun was still three hours passage above the horizon. The plot of ground was far outside the city limits, an area due for development in the near future. Barr knew he would be the first to build in this part of the county, which would give him the advantage. As Barr stepped out of the door onto the hard packed earth of the site, glimmers of light danced around his feet and chest, reflected from the polished glass and chrome of the limo. Barr walked over to the south side of the site, testing the resilience of the soil with each step. The hard earth felt no different, as he expected it would not. The clean fill and crushed stone he had used to pack the sunken area had settled firmly, exactly as he expected. No one would ever suspect that a six-ton bulldozer had fallen into a sinkhole at this spot. Luckily it had been at the end of a workshift, with few of the men remaining on the site. Barr had managed to cover up the accident and repair the damage to the terrain, without anyone becoming the wiser. At least without anyone he couldn't control becoming the wiser, Barr thought. The foreman and the two workers who had tried to get the dozer operator out of the hole had been transferred to another site across town. The accident that had killed them had been on the highway and not related to Barr's construction business.

Glimmers of light danced quickly around Barr's boots as the driver turned the car. Barr

looked over, just in time to see the vehicle pull out of the site, leaving him stranded.

"Hey, get back here," Barr called uselessly after the limo. The long silver vehicle pulled onto the highway and drove off without any sign the driver had heard Barr.

With a curse, Barr pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and dialed a number. That driver will never work again, if I have anything to say about it, Barr thought. A glimmer of light settled on his hand, shrinking down to the size of a coin. The heat of the focused light burned Barr enough to raise a blister and he dropped the phone, shaking his hand to cool the skin. Three glimmers of light dropped to the phone and focused their light. The plastic casing melted under the intense heat and the phone became a useless lump of circuitry.

"It's payday, Mr. Barr," he heard from his right.

Barr turned and looked. There was no one there. The site was empty, except for a few tufts of dried grass and a lone blackbird picking in the gravel. And the bird was too far away to have been the voice he heard.

"Always looking but never seeing," the voice spoke again, this time from Barr's left.

He spun around, searching for a speaker or an amplifier. There was nothing. All he saw were glimmers of light riding the tiny whirlwinds of dust thrown up by the movement of his boots. The lights flashed across his feet, heating the leather until Barr dropped to the ground and pulled off the footwear to stop the pain. He climbed back to his feet, moving away from the boots. The silver tips on the toes of the boots melted as the light focused on each filigreed point. The glimmers of light danced around his feet, but did not cross the stockinged toes. The heat of the packed earth, still baking in the hot Texas sun, was almost unbearable to Barr. He started to walk for the road.

The glimmers of light flashed around his feet, herding him with touches of heat on his stockings away from the road and back to the center of the site.

"Not yet, Mr. Barr," the voice stated. "We want to talk to you."

"Who are you?" Barr demanded.

"You know us, Mr. Barr," the voice said. "At least, you should know us. After all, you made the

final decision for all our lives."

Barr turned toward the sound of the voice. A glimmer of light floated in the air in front of him, reflecting from a faint cloud of dust hanging in the air. In the shifting planes of brightness, Barr could make out an image, a face. He strained to see the features better.

"Who...what are you?" Barr demanded again.

The image intensified, became clearer, and Barr stepped back from the glowing countenance. He did know this face. It was the foreman on the site, Gordon his name was, the one who was killed on the highway.

"It can't be you, you're dead," Barr cried out.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Barr," the voice agreed. "We're quite dead. All of us are dead. And you're the reason."

As Barr watched, the glimmers of light passed in front of him. Each glowing nimbus resolved into the face of a worker killed on a construction site managed by Barr, or a worker terminated permanently by Barr to tie up some loose end. There were a lot of them Barr realized.

"Ghosts only come out at night," Barr said, more to himself than to the surrounding images.

"Now what makes you think that, Mr. Barr?" Gordon asked. "After all, why should the darkness be the only place a ghost can appear? There are so many flashes of light, reflected glimpses of sunshine, or reflected glares from bits of chrome or steel or glass that the passage of a glimmer is lost in the shuffle. Which is just the way we like it, most of the time."

"Glimmer?" Barr repeated, questioning.

"That's what we call ourselves," the foreman replied. "Appropriate, don't you think? We're ghosts of the daylight, able to make use, in part, of the sunlight passing through us. That's how we were able to get your attention. And how we were able to tell your driver to leave without you. He knows you were going to fire him after tonight. And around you, termination of employment tends to be rather permanent on occasion."

"I didn't have anything to do with your death," Barr shouted.

Laughter echoed from the glimmers of light dancing around the contractor. Flashes of heat passed across Barr's face as several of the glimmers

made known the heat of their opinion.

"Don't be a fool, Barr," Gordon said. "We come into your office through the windows, sit at your desk, read your mail, hear your conversations. We know what you do and what you are. We know you didn't plan to kill some of us, but you used our deaths for your own gain. As for the others... I believe the term you're so fond of is 'tying up loose ends,' isn't it?"

"It's all a mistake," Barr shouted. "You don't understand the way it really happened."

"It's a mistake, all right, Mr. Barr," Gordon replied. "But you're the one who made it."

Barr's clothing began to glow as the glimmers flashed across his body. Each passage of a ghost brought a wave of heat. Each wave of heat was hotter than the last. Finally, Barr screamed in pain and began to run across the open lot, trying to reach the road and some kind of safety.

He never made it.

The two police cruisers sat to one side of the open lot. Four poles stuck in the ground held up the ubiquitous yellow tape so familiar to crime scenes. In the center of the square, a pair of scorched cowboy boots with melted silver toes lay on their sides on the baked earth. Near the road, a detective was interviewing Barr's driver, checking on his story.

"It's like I told you," the driver repeated. "Mr. Barr tells me to drive here after the meeting and drop him off. He tells me he won't need me any more that evening and to go back to the shop. The log should show I got back with just enough time to drive here and then to the shop. I figured Barr was meeting someone here at the site and didn't want me around to see what was what. I went home and had dinner and a beer. The next thing I know, you guys roust me out of bed this morning and bring me here. End of story."

"Was anyone else here when you dropped off Mr. Barr?" the detective asked.

"No, the lot was empty," the driver answered.

"All right, we'll have one of the cruisers drop you off at home. If you think of anything else about the trip here or what happened, give us a call." The detective handed the driver a card and waved to one of the other cops, pointing to the driver then waving a hand to signal he was finished with him.

The detective walked back to the taped off area. This was the only sign Barr had been here at all. Everything else about the man had disappeared. Normally a disappearance wouldn't be cause for alarm this quickly, but the fire in Barr's office had caused major damage and without Barr to give an accounting of what was lost or destroyed, burglary was still a possible motive. The detective looked down at the boots, their silver tips melted by some intense heat. There was a good chance those boots were somewhere near the fire in the office, the detective thought. Now he needed to find Barr and determine if the contractor was wearing the boots at the time.

The detective looked down at the ground around the boots, the baked earth surrounded a patch of sand, probably dropped from some construction vehicle, fused into a dark glass. A

lot of heat was thrown on this site, he thought. Maybe the planning of the fire took place here, with a test of some type of incendiary device. The detective shook his head again. He needed Barr to answer some questions. Where on earth could that man be?

He turned and walked away, not noticing the fused glass on the ground had a strange glint in its center. A fragile glimmer of light, a fragile image of a face the detective would have known had he seen it, seemed to be trying to beat against the glass and escape. And the glass lay in the exact center of the spot soon to be covered by the new buildings.

Richard Raymond Barr would be buried in darkness for a long time.

END

Mama Strangelove's Remedies For Afterlife Disorders or How I Learned To Stop Worryng and Love Mother Death

By C. Dean Andersson

Dead girlfriend from high school got into my old pickup. Her eyes were glowing, flickering purple, and something, several somethings, were rustling around beneath her hair. I asked, "Who are you, really?"

"Ashley."

"And who else?"

She winked at me, then said, "Kill yourself? Screw that. Need you alive. Wake up!"

So, I woke up, remembered the dream, found I was slumped sideways behind the wheel of my pickup, cheek pressed against the cold window. I'd stayed awake almost three days. Hadn't meant to fall asleep.

My leg, the one the army medics supposedly "saved," hurt like hell. Last pain pill was wearing off. But so what? Hadn't bothered with a new refill. Wouldn't need it.

Gust of wind shook the truck. A cold front had dropped temperatures into the teens overnight, low for North Texas, even in January. I had on thick gloves and a heavy camo jacket with the hood pulled up, but I was still cold. Breath was frosty. Thought about starting the engine, running the heater, but why bother?

Still hunched sideways, I looked up and saw trees edging the country road where I'd stopped. Bare branches arched overhead, swayed in the wind, rattled under gray skies.

Sat up straight, turned my head to stretch my stiff neck, saw Ashley in the passenger seat.

I jerked back in shock. Head hit the window. "Shit!"

"Sorry."

She looked and sounded real, but I looked away. Damned pain meds gave me bad dreams asleep, hallucinations awake. At least this time it was Ash, not more of my post-traumatic nightmare crap.

Out the windshield I focused on the solid cement barricade that blocked the driveway entrance to Bloom Town. Ash's family and mine had lived there when we were in high school. It was okay till Bloom Town Cancer started.

All the houses in the exclusively isolated, upscale development far north of Dallas were condemned and bulldozed years ago and a quick cleanup done, but faded biohazard warnings still showed on the barricade. Toxic-fill dirt beneath the McMansions had been traced to a closed military base. Watched my family, friends, and Ash slowly die. Waited to develop BTC myself, and I still might, if I kept waiting. But after my adventures in the U.S. Army, I'd had enough. Time to go.

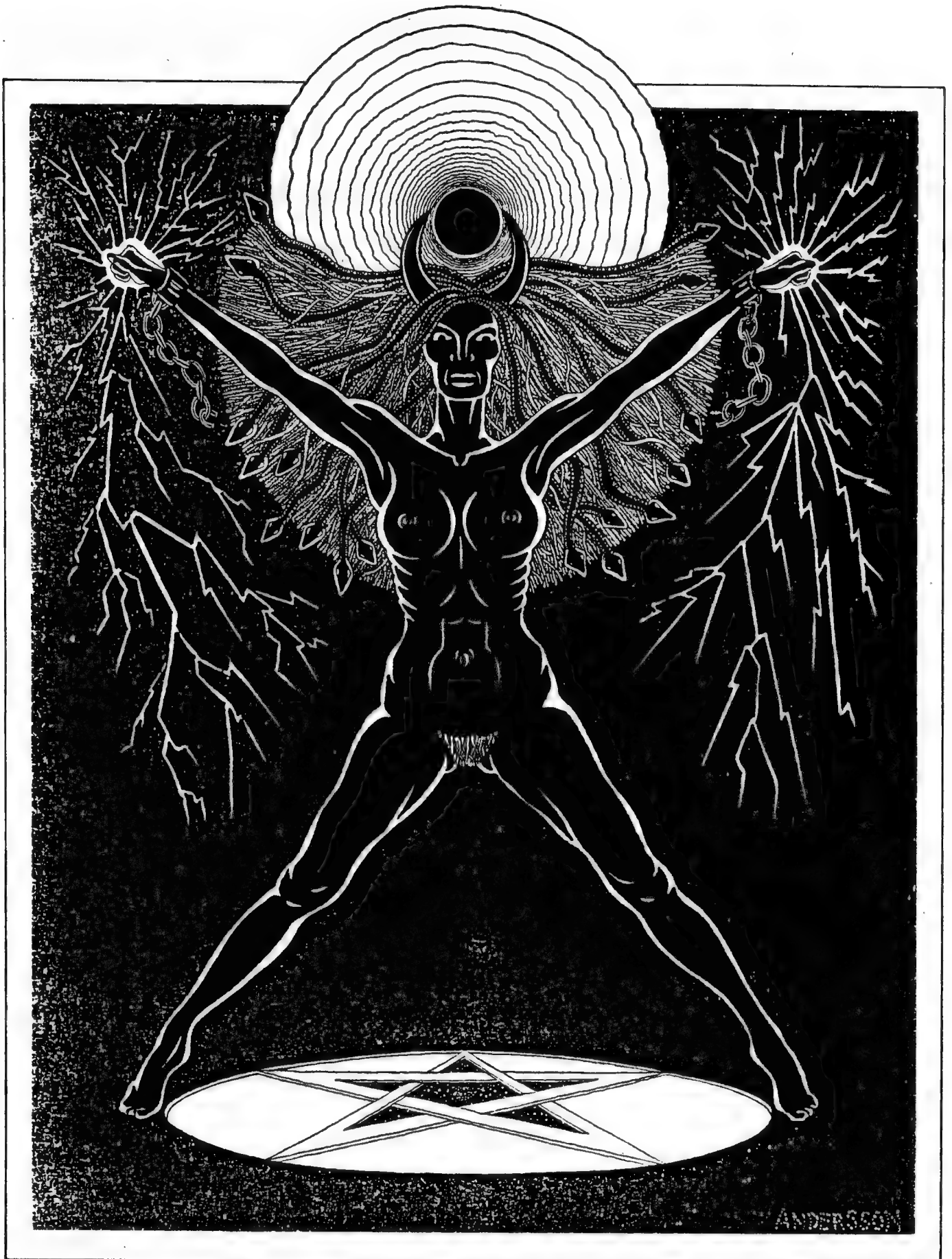
I reached into the pocket of my jacket for my Glock. The handgun was not there. Must have fallen out while I slept. I felt around between the seat and door. Nothing. Looked behind, beneath and beside me on the seat. Noticed Ashley was watching.

"I took your gun."

Sounded so real, I stopped and looked at her.

"Nice Glock. Hid it good."

I'd seen lots of shit that wasn't there in the last couple of years, but this was over the top. Her breath steamed in the cold air, even that detail of the hallucination was right.



ANDERSSON

Her blue eyes were right, too, no sign of the weird purple glow I'd seen in the dream. Her short blond hair looked soft and touchable, totally real, nothing creeping around beneath it. But her clothes were out of date, back from when we were dating, faded jeans with patches, old black Metal Militia tee stretched tight across full breasts that looked perfect, too, which was also right, because they had been. But if she'd been real, cold as it was, she would have needed a coat.

She ran a hand through her hair and raised an eyebrow in that way she had. "Look. Gonna sound crazy. But when you died over there, army medics had help bringing you back. A goddess I call Mama Strangelove wanted you alive. Wanted me alive, too, and here we are."

Army shrinks warned me not to talk to my hallucinations, especially the ones that seemed most real, but it no longer mattered.

"Weirdest crap yet. Mama Strangelove?"

"Or, since you met Her in Iraq, you could use one of Her names when Iraq was Sumeria. Ereshkigal. Allatu. Inanna's Sister. And there are thousands of others, different times and places. Or keep it simple. Call Her Mama, because She's our Mother now. Our Mother, Death."

"Where the hell am I getting this shit?"

"From me. And I'm getting it from Her."

"Bullshit. BTC killed Ash before 9/11. Real Ash wouldn't know I enlisted and got wounded in Iraq. And she'd need a coat."

"I enlisted, too. Guardian Angel duty. And I don't need a coat. When Mama brought me back from the dead, She heated me up inside."

"I am so sick of bullshit, especially my own, like this crap I'm making up."

"Bullshit didn't save your ass several times over there. I did."

"My leg says you missed one roadside bomb."

"Sent a warning. You were too bummed to listen."

"Buddy of mine died, day before."

"Yeah, so, I had to watch the IED blow your Humvee, then saw you die and meet Mama."

"Didn't see you."

"Didn't want you to."

"Because you weren't fucking there and aren't here now."

"Was. Am."

"Crap."

"We do what She wants, She lets me stay alive."

"What's Mama want?"

"Don't know, yet."

"Wish you were real."

"I am! Show you. Kiss me." She leaned closer.

I didn't move. Talking to something I knew couldn't be there was one thing, but kissing it-

"Here." She reached for my hand where it gripped the steering wheel.

I pulled my hand back.

She grabbed my wrist, jerked my glove off, took hold of my bare hand. "I'm real." She squeezed. "Feel me?"

Her hand was warm, almost hot. "Can't be real. Saw you buried."

"But Mama brought me back!" She held on to my hand.

"She isn't real, either." I pulled my hand away. "I had a nightmare when I died because oxygen was cut off to my brain. Then medics brought me back and post-trauma crap keeps replaying it. But that's it. Except for what the pain meds make me see, like now, like you."

"Hold still." She reached up and pushed back my hood. "Like looking at you, again, up close, in the flesh, and hearing you talk. Suffering's toughened you up. Improved your looks. And you were hot before."

Hadn't laughed in a long time, but I laughed at that. Just like Ash, finding a way to lighten me up.

She put a hand on my shoulder. "Pitt in *Seven*, that's you." Gave my cheek a quick pinch.

I touched her hair with my bare hand. Stroked it, softly. Felt real. "And you still look eighteen."

She leaned closer, put a hand on either side of my face. When she pressed soft, warm lips against my mouth, I slipped back into the good old days. Caught a scent of shampoo and spicy perfume. Remembered making love to her, planning our future.

I pulled back, this was now. I saw tears in her eyes, felt them in mine.

She smiled uncertainly, looked down, then back up. "Still love me?"

"Damnit to hell, Ash."

I gave up. Dream or vision, I needed her. Pulled her close. Held her tight, kissed her longer, deeper. She clung to me, moaned softly. Kissed me back, harder.

Loud tapping came on the roof of the truck.

We jerked apart.

A large crow flapped into view from the roof, landed on the hood, looked in with bright eyes.

"Fucking crow!" I hit the windshield. "Beat it!"

Ignored me.

"Hoped we'd have longer." Ash scooted away, put a hand on her door handle. "It's more than a crow. It's a message from Mama."

The crow rapped its beak on the hood, hard, then flew to the biohazard barricade, landed, looked back.

"Come on." Ash opened her door. Cold air poured in. "Do this for me. For us. I don't want to be dead again. And maybe we can finally be together. Our second chance. Let's take a shot."

She got out, pushed the door closed. Walked around the pickup, tapped on my window. "Please?"

I could've started the engine, tried driving away from whatever the hell I was experiencing. But Ash. That kiss. So damned real. I could still taste her. And she was waiting. I didn't believe the bullshit, but fuck it. I picked up my glove Ash had dropped on the seat, put it on, pulled my hood back up, and opened the door.

North wind hit me, slammed the door shut behind me. Bad leg cramped with pain. Kept in the scream that wanted out, let my good leg take most of my weight,

almost lost my balance.

Ash put an arm around my waist, steadied me.

"Thanks."

"Will your leg heal better, later?"

"No. But it'll probably loosen up a little, in a minute. How far we going?"

"There, for starters." She pointed at the barricade, then helped me limp-stagger up the driveway toward it.

"You been working out in the afterlife, Ash? You feel damned strong."

"Strong as I need to be, I guess."

The crow on the barricade cawed, soared ahead toward Bloom Town, over a rise, and out of sight.

We reached the barricade, headed around it.

"Where we going, now?"

"Following the crow."

"Great. We'll freeze. Death by crow. Who needs a gun?" Or maybe I'd already done it. Shot myself. Was I dead or dying and having a last dream? The thought stopped me in my tracks. Scared me bad.

She stopped, too. "What?"

Pushed back on the fear. Decided if I was having a last dream, there was nothing I could do about it. Saw the concern in Ash's eyes.

I leaned down and kissed her.

She snuggled into me, wrapped her arms around my waist. Just like old times. For a moment, I even felt warm.

She stepped back, looked up at me. "After we do what Mama wants, it'll be just you, me, and FEE."

I grinned at our old motto. "Sure. Fuck Everybody Else. No problem."

"Mama said I used to worship Her."

"When? That feminist thing? Drove your folks crazy."

She laughed. "Said it was in a different life. Said we'd both had lots."

"Of lives?"

"Some of them together."

"She makes up nice stories. Ought to sell used cars."

"Said you used to worship Her, too. It's why She picked us." She shrugged. "For whatever this is."

I pulled her close, gave her another kiss, made it last, until the crow cawed.

She pulled back. "You still kiss good."

"You, too."

Crow circled us, headed back to Bloom Town.

Ash put her arm around my waist and helped me forward.

We soon reached what had been Bloom Town. I knew all the houses were bulldozed long ago, but it was hard remembering how it had been and now seeing them gone.

Streets were crumbling, weedy and breaking up, and the toxic cleanup had left debris scattered around. A few of the trees the developers had planted were still there. But there were no birds or squirrels in sight, except the crow, which was now perched atop a bare-limbed tree,

watching us.

Limping through the debris with Ash, I got angry all over again. "Your folks should still be down the street from mine and us together in our own place, with kids. Know what kept me going sometimes? Revenge. Thought one day I'd get me some. But they still don't know for sure which assholes caused it."

"Bet Mama knows."

"Sure. Have to ask." Brought me back. Had forgotten for a moment I was dreaming or hallucinating.

"No, really. And maybe She could fix things, like in that old urban legend movie about the Death Wagon, except instead of Death behind the wheel, it'd be you and me, driving roads at night, fixing death disorders, helping ghosts rest, killing the bastards who killed them."

"I could get into that."

"I'll drive."

"Bad guys don't stand a chance."

We both laughed, but the sound choked off when Ash's house suddenly appeared.

We stopped and stared.

One moment there'd been only empty, debris-strewn terrain, then suddenly, a few yards ahead, her family's sprawling, two-story McMansion had materialized. It looked just like it had when we were dating. Warm golden light glowed in the windows and poured out the open front door.

Ash recovered first. She chuckled. "Guess Mama's showing off. Proving She's a goddess."

"Smart thing, turn around and leave."

"Don't think so." She pointed at the roof. The crow was there.

"Wish I had my Glock. Go crow hunting, later."

"Funny."

We moved forward, reached the threshold, and stopped at the smell of fresh popcorn. Heard canned laughter, like from a TV.

"Mama's creeping me out, Ash."

We stepped into the house. Memories hit me in the gut, and no wonder.

Down in the sunken entertainment room, a happy fire crackled in the fireplace. A big bowl of fresh popcorn waited on the coffee table in front of the leather couch where we liked to make out when her folks weren't there. On the TV was a sitcom we used to laugh at. But beside the fireplace was a doorway that shouldn't have been there, standing open, with stairs leading down. Soft light came from below.

"I love you." She clung to me.

"Love you back."

"Thanks for doing this, coming with me. I told Mama you wouldn't let me down. She wasn't sure."

"Then Mama doesn't know shit. About me. Us. No one ever did. Not even our folks."

"But they were coming around."

"Yours, maybe."

"Yours would have, too."

My turn to shrug. "Death make you an optimist?"

"Maybe being brought back to life did."

In the soft light from below, Ash suddenly looked as catch-your-breath beautiful to me as she had on our first date. That night, I'd watched a teenage goddess descend the stairs into my world and felt more like kneeling than ever I had in church. "Mama better treat you right, Ash. She may be your goddess, but you're mine. Forget I said that. Sappy. I'm just stalling."

"Better get this over, before you start writing me poems. Again."

"Never happened."

"The one about my teeth was my favorite. Braces and all."

"Surprised you didn't dump me."

"We're both stalling, now."

"Yeah."

So we started down the stairs.

I watched for trouble, as if I could have done anything about it, but everything looked normal, even to the bare cement floor at the bottom. Just a basement that shouldn't have been there. Empty. Too empty.

"Any idea what's waiting down here, Ash?"

"No clue. Probably Mama. At least."

"I am not looking forward to seeing that weird-ass woman again."

"She's not weird. She's awesome."

"Awesomely weird-ass, maybe."

When we reached the bottom, wasn't a big surprise when the normal basement went away. And I liked it even less when the stairs behind us vanished. But worse, I suddenly realized I was back where I'd gone after I died.

The huge, silent cavern was again lit by the jittery light of flickering torches. But I wasn't alone there with the weird woman, this time. This time, standing a few yards away, was a crowd of people, dozens of women and men of all races, shapes, sizes, ages, wearing all kinds of clothes. Some looked dressed for a costume party. Historical stuff. They stared at us without moving or making a sound.

I kept a wary eye on the crowd, but I also watched for the nightmare woman to appear. Jump out at me, again. Reach with Her snake-arms, open Her snake-mouth. I felt panic building, worse than my first combat. But I held on. Couldn't let Ash down. Nowhere to run, anyway. Just like after I died. The thought came again that maybe I'd shot myself, and my last dream was coming to an end.

"You're squeezing my hand too hard," Ash said.

"Sorry."

"This is where I followed you after you died."

"Yeah."

"But it's also where Mama brought me back to life. She calls this Her House of Dust."

"Catchy."

"Her Dead come here, but also those She brings back, I guess. If I'm not the only one."

My panic was fading, like after a fire fight starts and the first rounds didn't take you out. So we stood there, waiting.

The cavern was warm enough that I pushed back my hood, took off my gloves and stuffed them in a jacket pocket. I still hadn't seen anyone in the crowd facing us move, not even blink. "I think they're statues."

Ash pointed. "That one looks like my Uncle Mike, and that one like Dad's Grandma Jenkins."

"Some of them look a little like my relatives, too."

"Do you think . . . maybe they're us?"

"Us?"

"In other lives." She shrugged. "Just jumped into my head."

"Hope it jumps back out."

In a heartbeat the crowd changed. With a whooshing sound like rushing wind the people flowed together and morphed into a tall pillar of darkness that became a giant woman, towering ten, twelve feet above us. Naked. Her skin was coal-black iridescence, shimmering like oil on water. Her head was crowned by curved horns poking through a tangled, glistening black mass of hissing snakes. Eyes of purple fire glared down. Muscled arms stretched above. Her fists were clenched. Her legs were like massive ebony oaks planted wide apart on the floor.

Without thinking, I dropped into a defensive crouch. My bad leg cramped with pain and I almost fell. But Ash didn't move. She looked up at the monster and sighed, deeply. "No wonder we worshipped Her."

"That's Mama? Thought it'd be that snakey woman I saw."

"She can look lots of ways."

I straightened out of my crouch, but stayed ready to run or fight. Neither was much of an option, but old habits die hard.

The torches around the cavern and the fire in the giant's glowing eyes suddenly went dark. Lightning crackled from the clenched fists.

"Get down, Ash!" I dropped back into a crouch and raised my hands to protect my head. But that's when my bad leg gave way. Fell on my butt. "Ash?"

No response.

I groped in the darkness where she had been. Nothing.

"Ash!"

More lightning crackled. In the strobe-flash I did not see Ash. But I saw Mama, closer, leaning toward me, snakes reaching out, almost touching me.

I scooted back, trying to get away. Heard snakes hissing in the dark. "Ash! Where are you?"

Mama's eyes ignited again, close up, and the serpents started glowing with purple light all around me like the flailing bars of a living cage.

In the glow, I saw Mama grin. "Don't be afraid." Her breath stank of death.

"Fuck you! Where's Ash?"

The snakes reared back and struck.

Fangs sank into my flesh. Pain erupted everywhere, burned like acid in my blood.

I screamed and curled up into a fetal position in the dark and kept screaming.

Light exploded around me.

Eyes narrowed to slits against the glare, I saw I was again above ground, curled up on bulldozed dirt.

Screamed some more, agony everywhere, especially in my bad leg, but moments later the pain died to a dull ache and went away.

Panting for breath, I struggled to a sitting position and looked around.

The gray skies had cleared. Sun was dipping low in the west. It was going to be a deep freeze of a night. But that didn't matter. What mattered was that Ash's house was gone, and I was alone.

Heard a crow caw. Saw it perched in a tree, watching me. Just a crow. No Mama. No Ash. None of it had happened. Dream was over. End of the show. Must have sleepwalked from the pickup-

But the snakes. The pain. I gave myself a quick check, hoping I'd find snakebite punctures.

Nothing.

My last hope died.

None of it had been real.

I felt empty. Started crying. Great heaving sobs. For myself, sure. Self-pity has its place. But also, one more time for Ash, my family, my friends from Bloom Town and army buddies in Iraq. Too many. Too damned many.

I choked back the tears. I was wasting time.

Felt in my jacket pocket for my Glock. Thought it might still be there, now that I was awake. But it wasn't. Just found my gloves.

I put on the gloves, pulled up my hood against the cold, and got to my feet.

Figured my Glock had fallen out of my jacket pocket in or near the truck before I went sleepwalking. I'd go back and find it while there was still light enough to see, then do what I'd come there to do, end the pain and nightmares. Fuck 'em all.

I started walking, anxious to get it over, moving fast. Too fast.

I stopped.

Where was my pain? And my limp? Was I still dreaming? Who the hell knew anymore?

So I walked on. Both legs felt strong, like before Iraq. I expected the pain to come back with each step, but it didn't, and in no time I was at the barricade.

My pickup was gone.

In its place sat a massive black dump truck with sides built up so high you couldn't see into the back. Its engine came to life, roared and rumbled and throbbed. Black smoke belched from its twin diesel pipes.

The Death Wagon. That's what it was. From that urban legend movie Ash had mentioned.

When the first shock passed, excitement grabbed me. Who was driving? Windows were too dark to see in. But I felt hope.

I ran toward the Death Wagon. Nearer I got, the stronger grew the stench of death and decay. Breathed shallow and kept going. Reached up, jerked open the door. Saw Ash behind the wheel.

"Mama pimped out your pickup, a little. Get in!"

I did not hesitate. Leaped up, got in, and closed the door, feeling happier than in years. Then, a flicker of doubt. Was I still dreaming?

To hell with it. I no longer cared.

"Your Glock's in the glove box."

"Thought you said you hid it good."

"Good enough." She laughed.

It was warm inside the truck, and instead of the death stench, I smelled Ash's spicy perfume. I looked in the glove box, saw the handgun, left it there. Pushed back my hood, jerked off my gloves, gave my formerly bad leg a hard slap. "She fixed my leg."

"I asked Her to. Love you."

"Love you back." I leaned over and kissed her.

She put the Death Wagon in gear.

"Where're we going, Ash?"

"Away from this fucked up place."

In the crimson sunset sky I saw something huge, maybe just clouds, but for a moment it looked like a giant of a woman, vast and terrifying, striding over the world. Then it, She, was gone.

Ash floorboarded it, rolled faster and faster down the narrow country road. It was getting too dark to see. So I asked, "This thing got lights?"

"Don't need 'em."

In the gathering darkness, pinpoints of purple fire flickered in Ash's eyes. Made my insides squirm. Remembered the dream I'd had earlier. And with awakening dread, I had to ask, "Who are you, really?"

"I'm Ashley, silly."

"Okay. But who else?"

"I could ask the same about you, now. You know?"

"No."

She reached up and swiveled the rearview mirror.

In the mirror, my eyes glowed with purple fire, too.

"Shit." Scared me, a little. What else had Mama done to me? Then I noticed how the road and trees outside were becoming more visible, as if a full moon were out, several full moons. Soft light came from everywhere, casting no shadows. Reminded me of night vision without the goggles, colored silver.

But it wasn't only the road and trees I was seeing, now. There were other things out there, too, ghostly figures standing beside the road. Some of them looked human. Most did not. The ones with recognizable faces and hands seemed to be waving at us, and smiling.

I'd had it all wrong, the thought jumped into my head. None of it had been a dream. When Ash came back from the dead, I'd awaked to a new kind of real.

I looked over at Ash. She looked back and winked.

And soon, with the Death Wagon racing down the road and the nightmares waving as we passed, I began to relax. And smile. And wave back.



Dog Soldiers (2002) - (d) Neil Marshall

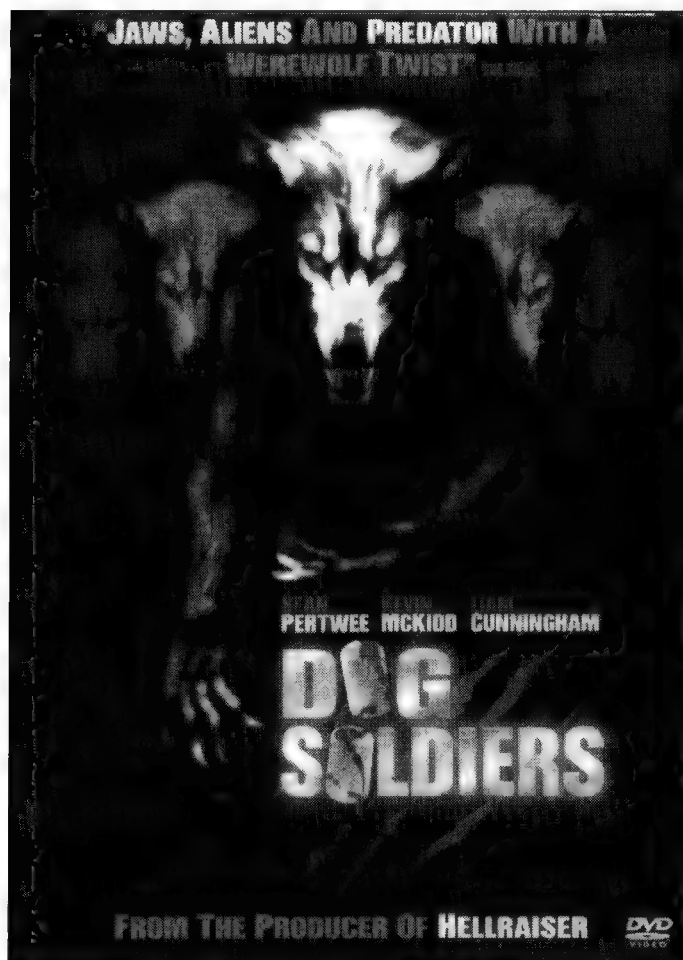
When Oz stops and thinks about it, he really can't say that there are a plethora of lycanthrope flicks worthy of a six-pack rating. Let's see, there's the original *Wolfman*, *The Howling*, *The Company of Wolves*, and perhaps, *Wolfen*. That's about it for the classics. No, Ken Russell's *Alternate States* doesn't count; William Hurt turned into an ape, not a wolf, in that one. Yes, Ozzy has seen all the latest hairy beast movies, including the fitfully entertaining but dreadfully overhyped *Ginger Snaps*. He's down with

all the horror happenings. Still, there ain't much good goin' on in the genre, wolfie or otherwise. So you can imagine Mr. Fide's surprise when he popped this one into the DVD player and, after little more than a half hour, found himself down to his last brew in the sixer. These were sixteen-ouncers, too. *Dog Soldiers* is that good, which should come as little surprise to anyone lucky enough to catch *The Descent* at the multiplex, as said flick was easily the best outing of 2005. Curiouser and curiouser, Neil Marshall wrote and directed that film as well.

Dog Soldiers wastes little time getting started. Open with a hippy couple in the Scottish Highlands getting torn to shreds in their pup tent. Now cut to the following morning and a small platoon of British soldiers on wargame maneuvers a few miles off. There's a bit of clever, manly chat to establish character, and then we stumble into the camp of their opponents. Only what's left of the other side is not choice, aside from one survivor - a bit of heart here, an entrail there - and no sooner does the platoon start to recover from their shock, when the howling begins and furtive movements are espied in the bushes. This, again, during broad daylight! And you thought werewolves only came out at night . . .

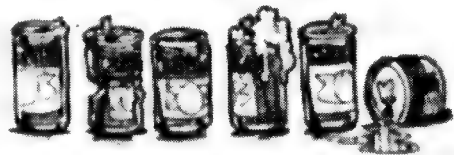
The attack isn't long in coming, and before the platoon hightails it to the road, one member is impaled on a tree limb and another has his stomach shredded. Miraculously, an SUV appears out of nowhere, driven by Megan, a beautiful blonde. She manages to get our crew inside and drive off, despite a werewolf ripping through the top of the roof. Turns out, she's an anthropologist researching the mysterious disappearances in the area, and she hustles one and all into the only cottage within fifty miles.

Right, you're asking at this point, how Megan managed to survive, not to mention the family of four who've been living in the charming fairy-tale-like house with lycanthropes roaming all about them. Of course, the clan just happens to be out when Megan and the platoon



hit the house running, so the answer is painfully obvious to the audience. The Army crew still doesn't get it, even when Megan explains things; but they really aren't given time to debate the point as the monsters, once the sun goes down, begin a full scale assault on the Yeatsian-styled hut.

At this point, the film begins to shamelessly ape *Night of the Living Dead*, but it really doesn't matter because director/writer Marshall is effortlessly mixing effective comedy with gruesome shocks and some wonderful plot twists to keep you on the edge of your seat. Remarkable too, is the dialogue; there isn't a single wasted line, and every bit of it is used to flesh out character and to advance the story. And those special effects, oh my, those are some genuinely frightening, realistic-looking werewolves. Let's hear it, too, for the gruesome and sometimes mortal wounds we are forced to witness. When a face is slashed, an arm lopped off, or head slowly bitten into, you feel it, deep in the pit of your stomach. Which can really hurt, if you, like Ozzy, are working on your second sixteen-ounce six-pack at this point.



Sex Slaves of the S.S. (197?)

(d) Ric Lutze

Some concepts must be dismissed out of hand. Like this flick, a pornographic exercise set in a Nazi extermination camp. Certainly the cartoonish, garishly painted sets, oafish acting, and absurd dialogue demand nay, order contempt. But with six million Jews having paid the price for Hitler's *endoslung*, it's hard to see just where we're supposed to laugh. Or to get titilated for that matter. Still, you have to give the filmmakers credit for the persistence of vision: Dr. Joseph Mengele as a daffy impotent visionary, S.S. guards as amiable drunken frat boys, Texas girls digging the Nazi vibe, anal rape to the accompaniment of oompah bands. No wonder the dull, brutish simians playing the *ubermensches* had trouble keeping it up; they too, were probably appalled by the script. Right, you're asking yourselves, "Hey, if Robert Benigni can get an Academy Award nomination for doing a concentration camp comedy, why jump all over these guys?" Well, Benigni had it all wrong, despite the brilliance of the performance. There are certain subjects too horrific, too monstrously depraved to lend themselves to ridicule. Genocide, rape, child molestation - satire cannot walk amongst them. Thus, when the *South Park* cartoon show tackled the subject, it went after NAMBLA, not the act of child molestation. When Mel

Brooks went after the Nazis in *The Producers*, there was nary a mention of Jews or Dachau. Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* showed the surreal insanity behind the Fascist mythologies; yet his Nazis remained, in the end, savage gangsters. Granted, the "brains" behind *Sex Slaves* hadn't a clue as to the symbolic or historic import of their setting; that doesn't excuse them, nor does it allow the viewer to dismiss their ignorance in the interest of freedom of expression. Nor does it give the distributor of this appalling embarrassment a free pass. A shame really, as said distributor's catalog contains any number of wonderfully erotic and truly groundbreaking films. Buy any one of those; but if you do, enclose a letter with your purchase and ask that they burn all copies of this abysmal, inhumane, anti-Semitic horror.

Dawn (2003) - (d) Jay Reel

"Daddy's little girl is hungry," indeed. If only the filmmakers had had the courage of their convictions and made their "little girl" about thirteen or fourteen years old, then this film would truly, despite its many faults, be one for the ages. That criticism voiced, Oz must admit that this tale of a nine-year-old vampire and her thirty-something slacker father and protector, manages to both entertain and provide a few shocks along the way. The shocks courtesy of the preadolescent playing the bloodsucker - born from the human father and vampire mother - who gives a genuinely moving and believable performance as the bamboozled child. Mr. Fide has no idea how she did it, what with all the dinner-theatre types surrounding her; still, she deftly walks the fine line between tortured pubescent and monster, making you feel both her need and subsequent revulsion over her hunger. Thus, her attacks on the aged and sick, her primary prey, are all the more horrifying. So when she goes off, it's really jarring, really frightening. And director Reel is right there, jumping all over the victim. Then jumping back. Pausing for a millisecond, then jumping away. Letting us enter into Dawn, panicking and screaming in frustration over her heartbreaking inability to reign in her bestial impulses.

Dawn, shot in black and white, allows Reel to cover a multitude of sins; primarily his inability to effectively give us a sense of place, or to establish ambiance in any given setting. The actors don't help much either, although Dawn's father does his manful best to establish rapport with his child star. The script too, is rather weak; we just go from town to town, staying one step ahead of the law and looking for diseased octogenarians. Still, in focusing on the plight of such a young monster, Dawn is able to effectively turn the conventions of the vampire film on

its head while giving the viewer, for the most part, a genuinely disquieting experience.



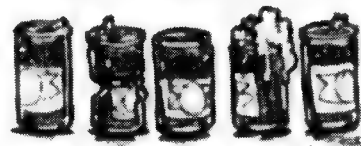
Vampire Strangler (1999/2008)

(d) William Hellfire

Brutarian covergirl Misty Munda in her first and only hardcore feature! Made when she was nineteen!! You may ask yourself: How hot is it? Our response: so hot that the filmmakers become overexcited, especially at being allowed to restore scenes with Misty sucking and fucking without restraint, and thus they forgot to retain the last couple of reels with Misty as a vampire seducing and fucking gals even younger than Misty is. On the other hand, that's a real shame; on the other, you'll probably need both hands to masturbate, so aroused will you become watching Misty fuck and suck in scenes that go on forever. The first blow job sequence, in particular, goes on for about a half-an-hour, and if you've seen a feature film

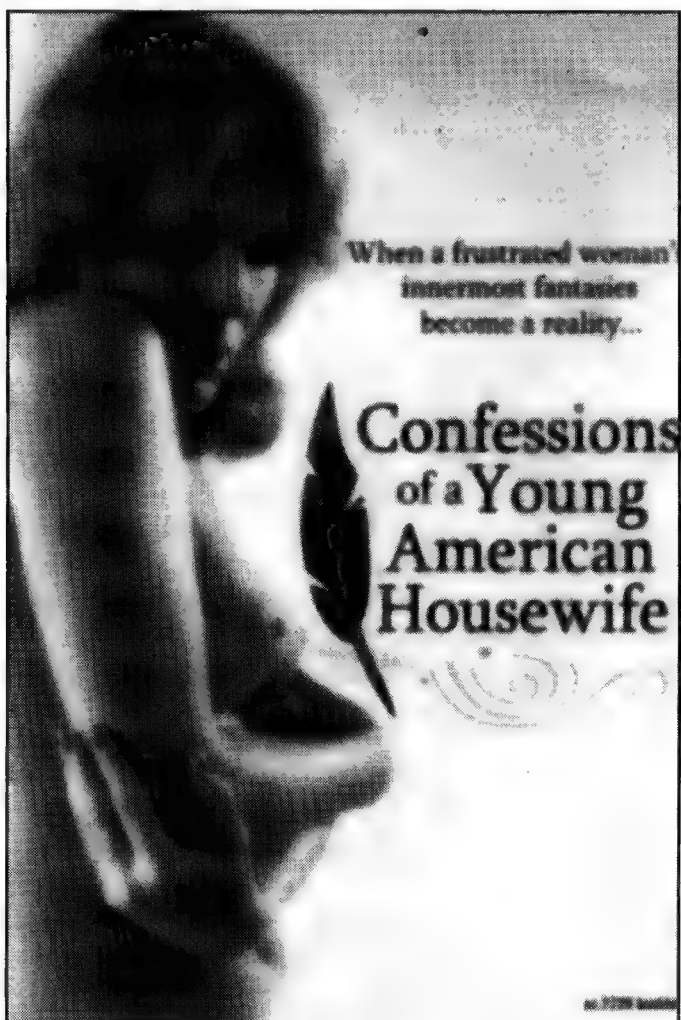


with a longer one, the folks at Brutarian would love to hear about it. The botched editing of this "restoration" leaves us without a story; but director Hellfire said he made the film primarily to show Misty's hairy hootch, and we do get plenty of that, so you can't really complain. Unless you're expecting her to spread and let you play the gynecologist. Again, Misty's only nineteen; be happy with the fact that that pretty, cherubic, swollen, barely adolescent visage is, in allowing herself to be ravaged, fulfilling every sick fantasy you've ever had but couldn't even admit to yourself . . .

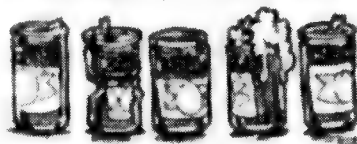


Confessions of a Young American Housewife (1974) - (d) Joe Sarno

No confessions here, just lots of gorgeous female nudity engaged in standard sex acts. With arms, legs, thighs and furniture tastefully obscuring all the hardcore action. It's still pretty hot though, as the housewife of the title, Carole (Rebecca Brooke), a preternaturally beautiful and willowy blonde, makes it all look like a home movie shot after hours. Carole's married to a good-looking doofus.



He likes to swing, but he's too lazy to stray with anyone other than the goofy couple next door. Carole doesn't seem to mind the almost daily switcheroos; in fact, she's become best friends with the other wife, Anna, as she's pixie-tomboy cute (Chris Jordon of *A Touch of Genie*) and eats pussy like a champ. Despite getting sex about thirty times a day, however, our little Ms. Brooke is haunted by a dreadful need: she wants to fuck her mother. That's sick! Wait, no it's not, as the mother is legendary porn star Jennifer Welles (yes, that Jennifer Welles of *Inside Jennifer Welles* fame). Jen, to put it quite simply, has a body made for sin. She's a blonde "Venus of Willendorf" composed of absurdly overripe parts - full pouting lips, tender rounded breasts, absurdly ample buttocks - and to once see her, is to fall in love forever. Carole was raised by Jennifer, making it somewhat more plausible that what Carole really wants, slash needs, slash desires, is her mommy. Yup, director Sarno's more than pushing the envelope here; because when you stop and think about it, what he's really asking us is this: If your mom, or sister, or dad, is a Greek god, is it really so wrong to want to do them? C'mon, admit it, whether you're a guy or a gal, if Jennifer Welles was your mom, you'd be in the hamper drawer every day sniffing her panties and playing with yourself. Sarno takes this as a given, so when he has Jennifer come for an extended visit, he makes light of the daughter's dilemma by having all the other characters freely and comically express their desire for Mother Jennifer. One of the more erotic scenes, in fact, comes early on, when Carole's hubby and the neighborly couple all minister to Carole while forcing her to admit her need to suckle at the breasts of Welles. Thereafter, the film seeks to navigate Carole into closer and more intimate exchanges with Mother, the emotional climax coming in an amazing sexual therapy session with Carole, Anna, Welles and a nymphomaniac counselor. Amusing, yes, but also arousing, as Sarno not only knows how to choreograph a softcore scene, he recognizes the value of distinctive looks and physiognomies. There's simply no possibility of drifting off into a sexual reverie when you have four unique forms crying out for attention. Sarno may have made over two hundred films in his career - seemingly the very definition of a hack - nevertheless, as he shows in this one sequence, the erotic can ascend to sublime heights in his hairy hands.



A l'interieur aka Inside (2007)

(d) Alexandre Bustillo & Julien Bustillo

These Frenchies really got it going with le horror porn, don't they? *Irreversible*, *High Tension*, and now this, a film so mind-bendingly gruesome, *Hostel* looks like a *Barney The Dinosaur* episode in comparison. Aye, and there's the rub: just how many cans, if any, is Ozzy supposed to give a film whose sole *raison d'être* - and screw those feminist readings of this flick, those chicks are living in a Saussurian dream world - is to have you screaming and throwing up all over yourself. Was it Stephen King who said when he can't raise a *frisson* with a story, he goes for the gross out? Well then, Mr. Fide is happy to avoid all responsibility and tell you *that* Mr. King, who is a genius, after all, would soil himself watching *Inside* as it's little more than a journey through an abattoir. No story. No plotting, really. Characters as ciphers. Conversation reduced to more desultory rejoinders and a few muttered asides.

Here's the set up: Sarah Scaragalo, a morbidly depressed and uncommunicative photojournalist (Alyson Paradis) who has recently lost her husband in an automobile accident, locks herself into her spacious suburban house on Christmas Eve to wait for her water to break. That's right, she's pregnant, and because she is, the crazy who shows up to stalk Sarah doesn't just want to cut Sarah up, she wants to do a Sharon Tate on her. As in, cut out the baby. Why? Well, our stalker is a woman (Beatrice Dalle), and despite being rather attractive, apparently she's laboring under the delusion that the only way she can get herself a kid is by ripping off, er, out, one from an expectant mother. So the filmmakers let Dalle into the house, she cuts up Paradis who, in the process, somehow manages to escape and lock herself in the bathroom. The end. That's it. The rest of *Inside* has Dalle and Paraids stabbing, grabbing, dicing, slicing and mutilating each other in an attempt to get the upper hand. And offing, in spectacularly gruesome and inventive ways, those unfortunate enough to ring or knock at the front door. By the film's end, the viewer is left wondering how Paradis and Dalle are able to walk upright as almost every inch of every floor in the house is covered in blood and viscera. Oh yes, and while Oz won't spoil things for you sickos who make it to the denouement, know that said denouement is easily, *easily*, the most stomach-churning, horrifying, and just plain-wrong sequence in the history of Western civilization.

AUDIO DEPRAVATION

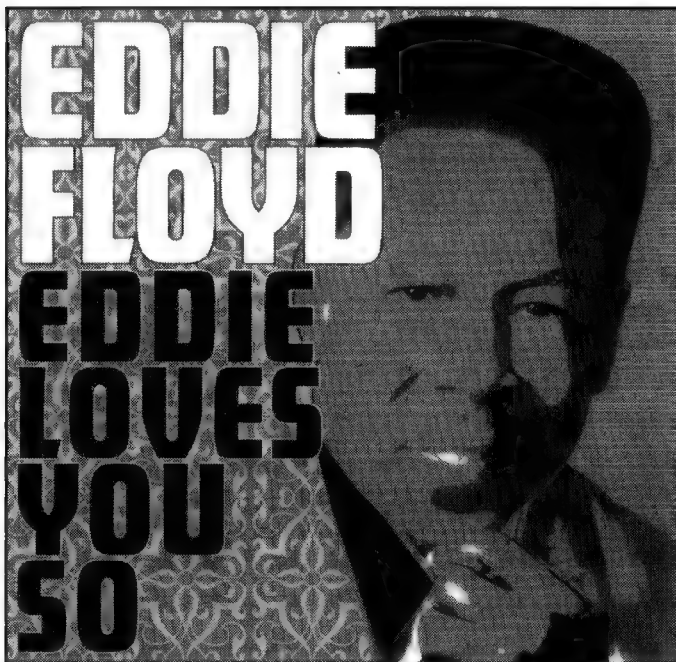


Steve Cropper & Felix Cavaliere – Nudge It Up A Notch (Stax) Eddie Floyd – Eddie Loves You (Stax)

As any 60s soul fan, I was excited to hear that the Stax label was recently resurrected; these two new CDs, by Steve Cropper/Felix Cavaliere and Eddie Floyd, represent the first releases by the revived company. There is no more Stax studio, per se. Steve and Felix's album was cut in Nashville, and Eddie's in Massachusetts. Nonetheless, I was hoping that the old Stax sound would come through on these new CDs. How are they? The good news – the Steve/Felix release is a keeper! First, this album should be mandatory listening for every guitarist on the planet – Cropper's playing is as sublime as ever, nary a note or lick or tasteful solo out of place. Ex-Young Rascal/Rascal Felix C's pipes are as strong and soulful as in the 60s (why isn't this guy making tons of dough cutting albums of classic Motown tunes, instead of Michael "Foghorn"



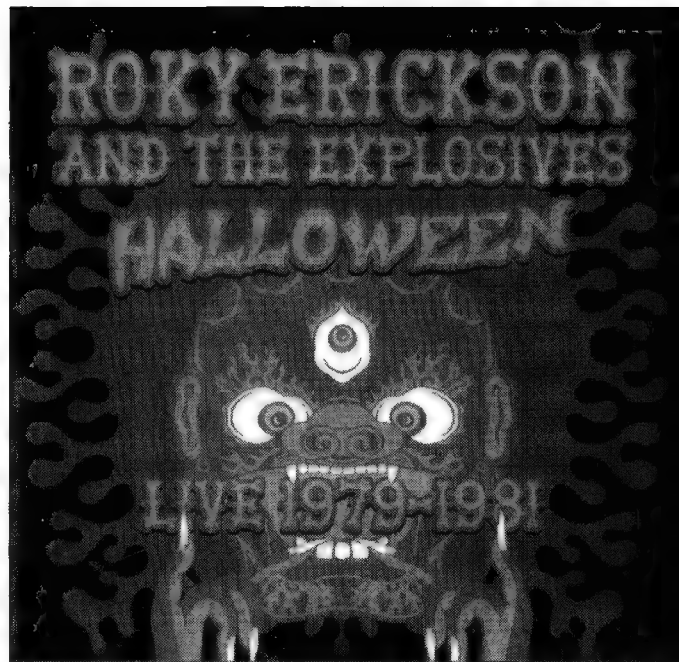
McDonald?). The rest of the band – a stripped-down four piece a la Booker T & Co. – drummer Chester Thompson of Zappa/Fogerty/Genesis fame, and Curtis Mayfield protégé Shake Anderson on bass, digs itself deep into the pocket, and stays there. The songs, collaborations involving Steve, Felix and co-producer Jon Tiven (who's produced comeback albums by Don Covay, Little Milton, Betty Harris, Syl Johnson, and Wilson Pickett – his last recording) are, for the most part, classic 60s/70s soul fare, several of which (notably the gorgeous "If It Wasn't For Loving You" and the opener "One Of These Days") would have been radio hits forty years ago. There are also nods to more recent soul – "Make The Time Go Faster" with its rap lead vocal, and the funkified "Still Be Loving You." It's not perfect – a little variation from the mid-tempo groove throughout would have helped, and four of the twelve songs are instrumentals, a couple of which are begging for lyrics and Felix's voice, too! And no horns on a Stax release? Overall, though, a cool, laid-back success and a very, very welcome comeback for these two legendary artists!



The bad news – while Eddie Floyd’s new album covers a variety of killer songs from his days with The Falcons (with Wilson Pickett and Sir Mack Rice), and 60s heyday when he penned a slew of great songs for others (Sam & Dave, Carla Thomas, Wilson Pickett, etc.), and his backing band does a decent, if not very Stax-like job, his voice sounds pretty shot. After playing this new CD, I tossed on his *Knock On Wood* album from the mid-60s and, sadly, it’s even hard to tell that it’s Eddie on this new release. A damn shame. . . I have tickets to see the Stax 50th Anniversary Show at the 9:30 Club in September, featuring Booker T & The MGs, and Eddie F. Will see if the new album by Eddie is just an aberration. Sure hope so! (John Oliver)

Roky Erickson & The Explosives – Halloween (Live 1979-1981) (Steady Boy Records)

As a teenager in the 60s and in my twenties during the 70s, a lot of music made such an indelible impression on me that certain songs/artists are almost a part of my personal DNA now, it seems. There’s the obvious – Buddy Holly, Elvis, The Beatles and Stones, and the less likely – Captain Beefheart, Bobby Fuller, Raspberries, The Flamin’ Groovies, etc. Roky Erickson, as the singer and front man for The 13th Floor Elevators and as a solo artiste, falls smack dab in the middle of this latter category. I immediately recognize the strains of “You’re Gonna Miss Me,” “Splash 1,” “Red Temple Prayer (Two-Headed Dog),” and “Don’t Shake Me Lucifer,” the same way most other people recognize “Hey Jude” or “Love Me Tender.” As such, I’ve gone out of my way to make



sure I see the recently-returned-to-the-world-of-the-living Roky live every chance I get. I’ve seen him seven times since 2006, four times in NYC, twice in Austin and once in New Orleans (this past Ponderosa Stomp). In addition, since I met Explosives’ drummer and .ex-head Shakin’ Apostle Freddie Steady Krc about six years ago, I also try to catch him live every time he’s anywhere within reasonable geographic range, and since he’s returned to playing with Roky, it’s an extra bonus! But I digress - the point I’m trying to get to eventually here is – every time I see Roky & The Explosives live, I hear THE definitive versions of most of the songs they play, both Elevators’ and Roky solo tunes and they keep getting better and better live! Roky’s voice has pretty much returned to the days of old, and The Explosives are an absolute force of nature live! After each show, I wind up at home, playing the old original studio recordings of Roky’s . . . and dammit, they’re just not anywhere near as powerful as the live juggernaut versions I’ve just heard; they’re being replaced in my DNA by the live versions, which brings us to this new release on Steady Boy Records (Freddie’s label). Recorded during the 1979-1981 period when The Explosives (Freddie, guitar-slinger extraordinaire Cam King, and bassist Walter Collie) were touring with Roky as his live band, these twenty-seven to twenty-nine-year old versions, mostly in great sound quality, considering when they were taped, positively shred the studio versions to bits! Mind you, Roky and the band are even better now, in 2008, but this’ll have to do until they get around to recording a new live album. Ferocious versions of pretty much the same songs they still play together to this day, with several surprises – such as an improvised-on-the-spot take of the Fab Four’s “I’ve Just Seen A Face.” As

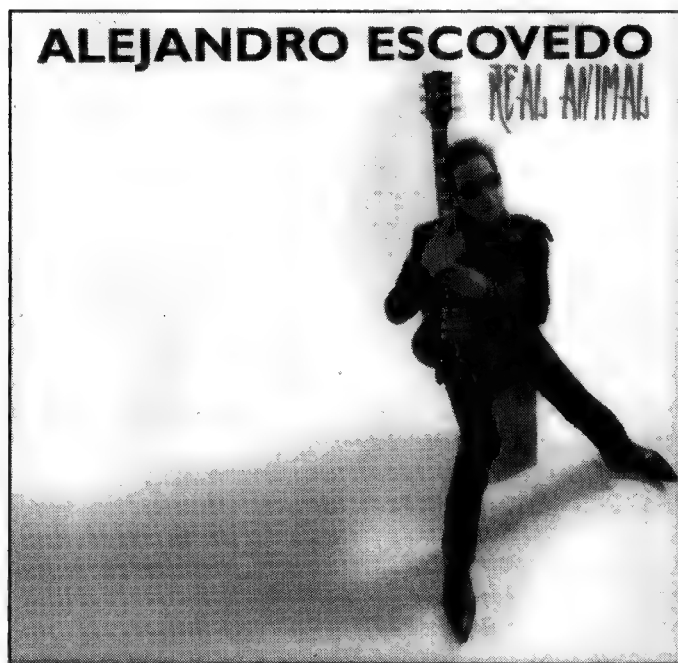
Jud Cost says in the liner notes, we only think we've heard these songs before . . . and we're wrong! Rumors have it that: (1) Roky is sitting on a pile of new songs he's going to record, and (2) Billy Gibbons will be producing the resulting album. If there's any justice in this world, Willie G. needs to let The Explosives back Roky on the new studio album. By the way, a very cool CD cover and package put together by poster-maestro Dennis Loren, and our buddy Kent Wood of Cahoots Graffix! (www.cahootsgraffix.biz) (John Oliver)

Alejandro Escovedo – Real Animal (Back Porch)

An on-line friend of mine recently mentioned that she met and talked with ex-Nun, ex-Rank & Filer, ex-True Believer, ex-Buick MacKaner and *No Depression* magazine's Artist-of-the-Decade for the 90s, Alejandro Escovedo, at a fundraiser for Hepatitis-C several years ago in Texas, and he looked like death warmed over, at least one hundred years old. Sadly, things weren't looking good at all for Alejandro for several years, owing to complications from the aforementioned disease (coupled with his noted excesses, especially drinking). Happily, though, he appears to have made a spectacular recovery, if this new release is any indication. *Real Animal*, his second studio effort since his serious illness, is his hardest rocking and, arguably, his best album ever! Kinda surprising, since his last CD, 2006's John Cale-produced *The Boxing Mirror*, was a dense-sounding, harrowing downer of an album, chock full of gloom-and-doom lyrics, reflecting a very depressed state of mind. Whatever he's been doing

or taking the past two years to get better, it's working! Live, Escovedo's sound has usually been a cross between acoustic country, loud rock & roll guitars, and strings (cello & violin) – an unholy mélange which sonically resembles the old Velvet Underground from the days when Cale was wielding a mean viola. For the new release, AE entrusted this sound to Tony Visconti of Bowie/T.Rex fame, who's added a glossy metallic sheen to it, with even louder guitars. In addition, Alejandro's new songs, co-written with Chuck Prophet (ex-Green On Red), are more poppy and hook-laden material than usual. The lyrics all appear to reflect various phases of Alejandro's life and career, from his Nuns days ("Nuns Song") to Rank & File ("Chip & Tony"), to the True Believers ("Sensitive Boys"), to his days in NYC ("Chelsea Hotel"); to his influences, such as Iggy Pop and The Stooges ("Real Animal" and, on the vinyl version, a cover of "I Got A Right"). He's even released a new single – "Always A Friend," a version of which also appears on Bruce Springsteen's *Magic Tour Highlights* EP – a duet with Alejandro. Al and his band still rely heavily on the strings live, and the new songs sounded great, sans Visconti's production, at the 9:30 Club this past July. Hopefully, the new album, last seen bubbling under *Billboard's* Top 100, will make a lot more people aware of this great talent. Now, if I can just figure out exactly what the Hell "alt country" is, I can die happy (I love Alejandro's music, as well as his Mott The Hoople/Stooges obsessions, but can't stand Jeff Tweedy and Wilco – way too boring...yet they're both allegedly alt-country (???)).

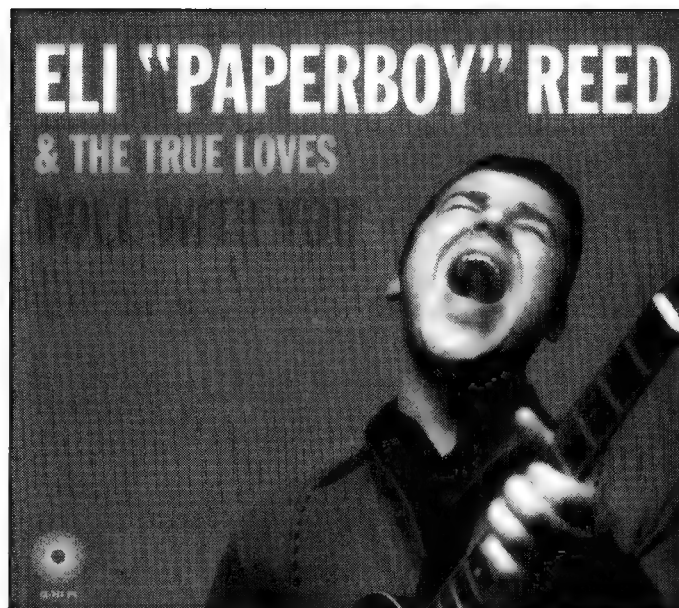
T-Model Ford – Jack Daniel Time (Mudpuppy Recordings)



About five to six years ago, I ventured out to the Iota club in Arlington, VA, to catch several Fat Possum label blues artists in concert, including one T-Model Ford, who was headlining. When I arrived, about an hour before the show, and sidled up to the bar, I was immediately accosted by said headliner, who informed me in no uncertain terms that: (1) it was his 80th birthday, and (2) therefore, I needed to buy him lots of drinks. Being a sport, I bought T-Model a drink ("Jack Daniel" on the rocks, by the way . . . don't know what happened to the "s" in the brand's name, although I suspect Mr. Ford probably stole it and still has it!). Two or three drinks later, when I returned from the club's restroom, it turned out that our beloved editor/publisher Dom had arrived, headed straight to the bar, and was in the process of helping T-Model celebrate his eightieth with more alcohol. About fifteen minutes and several drinks later, as T-Model staggered out through the entrance, presumably to vomit or pass out in the alley next to the Iota, a responsible-looking fellow, allegedly Ford's manager, approached Dom and yours truly and asked us, "He didn't tell you it was his 80th birthday today, did he?" Apparently T-Model's birthday was every night of that particular tour! Anyway, the self-proclaimed "Boss of the Blues" has just recorded a new CD on the fledgling Mudpuppy label and, as in the case of his various Fat Possum releases, it's full of his usual drunken nonsense . . . No, actually, it's worse this time, because this one was recorded live in a Mississippi roadhouse, so they didn't have the benefit of making him sleep it off if he was too drunk to play. Yes, it's as authentic and raw as you can possibly get. As a novelty, this time they've paired him up with a harp player, who has as much trouble keeping up with his changes and key switches as the drummer or anyone else in the band. Surprisingly, Delta blues drummer extraordinaire Sam Carr plays a couple of tunes with T-Model. The last time this was attempted for Fat Possum, Sam and the other musicians who had volunteered for the session gave up and left when T-Model kept badgering them that, "T-Model is going to remember you sorry fuckers how it's done!" Could be why half of the cuts here are just Ford and a curiously tuned acoustic guitar. By the way, he's listed as being eighty-four-years-old as of 2008 . . . so surprisingly, he wasn't that far off at the bar that night! (John Oliver)

Eli "Paperboy" Reed & The True Loves – Roll With Me (Q-Division)

Shortly after the SXSW Fest in Austin in March 2008, word leaked out about a twenty-three to twenty-four-year-old Jewish kid from Boston, a live dynamo of a performer making genuine soul music, the likes of which nobody's

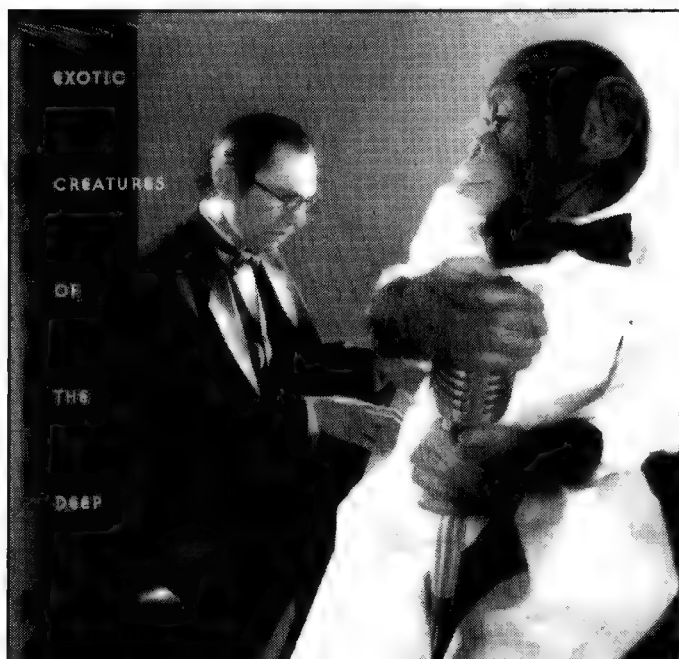


heard since the 60s. Turns out that Eli "Paperboy" Reed (real surname Husock) has been playing Boston clubs for about four to five years, after returning from a nine-month sabbatical in '03 to Clarksdale in the Mississippi Delta, where he befriended and was tutored by old bluesmen like Sam Carr (see review of T-Model Ford above) in the ways of Da Blooz. After nine months of playing live in ratty juke joints to mostly non-white audiences for little pay, he returned up North, where he recorded and put out a debut CD, *"Walkin' & Talkin'" and Other Smash Hits*, which showcased his very promising if unpolished blues singing and songwriting. I understand Eli would just as soon forget about his debut CD, based on his astounding growth as an R&B singer and entertainer since 2004. My God, what a difference four years has made!!! On *Roll With Me*, his second release, he's channeling the spirits and sounds of Otis Redding, James Brown, Sam Cooke, and Ray Charles, with an incredibly tight soul band that's easily the equal of those much-heralded white boys from Brooklyn who've been backing Sharon Jones and Amy Wino-house. Not only that, but the kid's a killer live act as well, sweating more on stage than anyone I've seen since James Brown . . . and this CD only hints at the power in his voice now! When I first got this CD, I thought it was damn near perfect, except for Eli's songwriting, which seemed a little weak in spots. After multiple listenings, though, I love most of the songs now, too. There are some rather obvious cops/tributes – "The Satisfier" is as close as you'll ever get to hearing a White boy do James Brown, and the ungodly catchy "Take My Love With You" sounds like a long-lost Sam Cooke single just waiting for thousands of DJs to play it . . . but most of the songs share a wide variety of 60s soul references and influences. And have I mentioned yet? – this kid has the best soul scream ("cornbreeding" was what Wilson Pickett called it) I've

heard in decades. He sounds like he really means it! This boy has his work cut out for him . . . much like Barack Obama's comment about his not looking like our former presidents, the Paperboy, likewise, doesn't look like most legendary soul and blues singers . . . and to add insult to injury, he's working in a genre that, to put it mildly, ain't all that popular nowadays. Highly recommended. (John Oliver)

Sparks – Exotic Creatures Of The Deep (Lil Beethoven Import)

First of all, I admit it – like most, I'm a sucker for a monkey or a chimp! Put one of those hairy fuckers on a CD/album cover and I'll definitely check it out. Well, there are two covers for this new, so far import-only release – Sparks' twenty-first album over the past thirty-seven years or so. On the regular release, the tuxedo-clad chimp is sitting in for Ron Mael at the piano while Russell is singing; on the limited-edition release, he's got the mike, pretending to be Russ, while Ron in the flesh is pounding on the 88's. I think I prefer the latter one, since the ape doesn't appear to know what to do with the microphone. But enough about the damn chimp! What about the album, Oliver? First of all, like their last three to four releases (especially 2003's *Lil' Beethoven* and 2006's *Hello Young Lovers*), the brothers Mael don't exactly follow any sort of convention when it comes to their music. Is it pop, dance music, opera? Is it something that Scott Walker may have actually recorded that they've erroneously put their names on? Who the Hell knows? It's totally insane shit, a guaranteed unique listening experience – it's catchy and has a beat that you can dance



to, and Ron writes the funniest damn lyrics in all of pop music! This latest album is worth buying just for, in my opinion, the best love song ever written, "I Can't Believe That You Would Fall For All The Crap In This Song," which consists of verses of Russell M. proclaiming his undying love for his lady, and pining on about how he simply can't live without her . . . followed by the chorus, which is the title repeated several times. Another example: "Lighten Up, Morrissey," a tune about how a poor shmoe can't get to second base with his girlfriend, due to her infatuation with the oh-so-fabulous and gay Mr. M . . . so he's singing to Morrissey to quit being so perfect and "Morrissey-edque," so he'd stand a chance. Other classics – "Let The Monkey Drive," (the inspiration for the chimp covers, I'm guessing) "(She Got Me) Pregnant," and the annoyingly catchy "Good Morning," the first single from the album. It's really hard to believe that Sparks is just Dean Menta (ex-Faith No More) on guitar, Tammy Glover on drums, Russell singing, and Ron on keyboards – they sound like dozens of musicians most of the time, thanks to Ron's synth shenanigans and multiple-tracking of Russell's voice. They recently completed a twenty-one night stand in London, doing a different album in its entirety each night in chronological order. I understood the shows were outstanding . . . now, if they'd just play the US once in a blue moon. You may love this CD, you may hate it . . . but I guarantee you haven't heard anything quite like it! (John Oliver)

The Wildhearts – Stop Us If You've Heard This One Before, Vol. 1 (Phantom Sound & Vision)

I seem to review a new release by either The



Wildhearts or their charismatic and deranged-but-in-a-nice-way front man Ginger in every issue of *Brutarian*. It's true, these guys are very prolific, and it's true that they're also among my all-time favorite bands and artists. There are so few groups or singers out there who are equally comfortable playing either the heaviest metal or the poppiest power pop - and sometimes within the same song! Also, the ginger-haired one is one of my all-time favorite songwriters, which is why I approached this new release with a bit of trepidation - it's *Volume 1* (and how many they plan on doing, you'd have to wonder...) of a series of all-covers albums. In this inaugural release, they cover mostly 80s and 90s bands, most of whom I've heard of and heard, but am pretty unfamiliar with - Foil, The Unband, The Icicle Works, The Distillers, Helmet, Fugazi, Super Furry Animals, Toadies, The Descendants, The Lee Harvey Oswald Band, Georgia Satellites, Baby Chaos, Regurgitator, Soul Asylum, and Warren Zevon (how did HE wind up here?). Per the liner notes, these are all bands which have greatly influenced The Wildhearts over the years, which strikes me as very interesting, as I've always heard older, more traditional (for want of a better term) influences in their music, like the Beatles, Motorhead, Cheap Trick, and the late 70s English punk bands. Then again, I'm in my late 50's, at least fifteen years older than the oldest Wildheart. This is a great listen, and educational for an old fart like me, although honestly, the songs which work the best for me here are ones that sound the most like classic Wildhearts/Ginger songs - "Understanding Jane," the Icicle Works cover, "The World Comes Tumblin'," originally by The Distillers, and "Rearrange You," the Baby Chaos tune, probably come the closest. You know it's a good collection of covers if it

makes you want to seek out the original versions! Not my favorite Wildhearts album, but that's to be expected . . . Still, buy it and support this great band! (John Oliver)

Wanda Chrome & The Leather Pharaohs - More (Disturbed)



We know little about Milwaukee's "loudest" band. Other than the fact that they are from Milwaukee. And that they are a three piece, led by this tough-looking, blonde biker chick calling herself Wanda Chrome. And that she is not really the leader, as she plays bass and sings back-up vocals. Also that her/their first release will cost you 47.95 should you wish to add it to your collection. And that they've been around for about fifteen years or so, have toured overseas, and hard-drinking, semi-legendary proto-punk bands from the bigger cities speak about the trio in hushed tones. OK, so we know a little bit about this group; now it's time you knew about them, too. They're one of the last true exponents of the Detroit sound pioneered by Iggy and the MC5. You'll probably get that long before you hit the ninth cut, an absolutely killer version of "Loose," in which the pace is accelerated, the vocals reduced to hortatory exhortations, and the guitar seeks to inflict as much damage as humanly possible within three minutes. Wanda and her boys may give their props to "Detroit Gods," as they do on the second cut, but they're hardly slavish imitators. They can swing with the big boys, my friend, just listen to them make Radio Birdman's "New Race" their own, or reduce the Ramones' aesthetics to less than the bare minimum on "1.2.3.4."

"No Respect" would not sound out of place on *It's Only Rock and Roll* and "Soul Revolution," would have made a perfect closer for *Kick Out The Jams*. It's high-energy anarchy, confusion worse confounded by histrionic guitar assault, trash mixed with savoir faire. Made all the more glorious by the lead vocalist's insistence on shouting out every last fucking syllable on the disc. (Dom Salemi)

The Juke Joint Pimps - Boogie The House Down - Juke Joint Style (Voodoo Rhythm)



In the States, this here is called the "No Justification Blues." That's 'cause there just ain't no justification for playin' the blues like this. Even if you are corncasion. Germaines, too. Never the lesser, these two boys do play with the passion and conviction. So's they failin' kind of nobley. Like them Stones when they first started out back in the 60s. Here, though, everything pared back. Back to the bone, with only drums, harmonica and guitar. The voices sound like one of them Fat Possum label's men at times. If'n you don't listen too terrible close. Southern Mississippi type. Sometimes like through a megaphone, as it gets distored and wild and such like. Listening to them Howlin' Wolf and Elmore James 78s done taught them something for sure. They even give credit to Muddy and Mr. Johnson on two of the songs which rates rare for white boys cutting blues. No disguising "Dick Shake" is Slim Harpo "Hip Shake" though. He dead so most like he don't need the monies. (Mercedes McCumberbund)

Captain Beefheart Under Review (MVD DVD)

Everyone remembers their first Beefheart experience. For this reviewer, it happened whilst watching an early weekend viewing of a local UHF rock show. The station couldn't afford to host the more popular acts, a good thing for the stoned and more adventurous viewer as this meant the suits were forced to fill up the time with the acts with little, if any, commercial potential. So at twelve, an innocent child found his fragile little mind being twisted by the likes of Sir Lord Baltimore, The Illusion, Doctor John and the good Captain aka Don Van Vliet. He'd never heard, or seen anything like it, a Dada mixture of Delta blues, harmelodic jazz, and post-modern classical stylings, fronted by a guy dressed like the Mad Hatter doing a Howlin' Wolf imitation. When he wasn't *sprechstimming* his surreal, acid-induced visions. And that band. They dressed like they just landed from Venus, and they moved like they just learned to walk upright. Not surprising, as Beefheart kept stopping things and forcing the band to lurch into one absurd time signature after another. Just as total confusion appeared to set in, everything went quiet, the house lights dimmed, and Beef slowly and theatrically reached into his coat pocket and brought out a toy raygun. You remember those things, they made a rusty screech and emitted sparks from the side when you pulled the trigger? Of course you do, and that's what the audience saw and heard for about thirty seconds until the band kicked back in. Unforgettable, and here I am remembering as if it was yesterday, some forty years later. Yeah, you guessed it, this was stuff from the epochal *Trout Mask Replica*, and just like that, abba zabba, I was hooked.

The English folks working this documentary are "hooked" as well. Hell, you'd expect that from guys who've listened to *Trout Mask* some sixty times. And what you get is a very entertaining history and exegesis, from the first single, "Diddy Wah Diddy," to the last album, *Ice Cream For Crow*. There's lots of wonderful lost and archival footage, extended intercut comments with Drumbo (speaking to us by way of a disconnected phone hanging from a tree limb), Zoot Horn Rollo, Rockette Morton, Winged Eel Fingerling, and Gary Lucas, to name just a few, and lucid and incisive critical examinations of the entire oeuvre. While you may not always find yourself in agreement with the conclusions of the British journalists - you can express disappointment with a Beefheart work like *Bluejeans and Moonbeams*, but "too commercial" you cannot call it - their encyclopedic knowledge of their subject makes it difficult to find fault with their analyses. Especially those of the eminence gris of the group, who has chosen to deliver his pronouncements

from a church pulpit, a sly bit of surreal humor, nicely undercutting his tight-lipped and straight-laced remarks. A bit of "theatre," which the Captain, no doubt, would have heartily approved. (Dom Salemi)

You Only Get One Shot At The Big Time - Various (Wizard In Vinyl)

Connecticut pop music scholar and record collector Kevin Graves has spent most of his adult life scouring the four corners of the globe unearthing lost and otherwise neglected works of obscure rock-and-roll bands. This comp, which fetches opening bids of fifty dollars for unopened copies at swap meets and conventions, features five combos, three of which are worthy of your attention. Moreover, said trio - M80s, the Blackjax, and The Ejectors - are presented first, thusly providing the listener sixteen-continuous slices of pure pleasure. The M80's kick things off, a surprisingly agile powerpop aggregate hailing from, of all places, Hartford, Connecticut. Playing "pop punk music for the future," this three piece mixes catchy hooks, inventive guitar playing, and quirky melodies to create memorable, arresting compositions. Like all great punk bands, L.A.'s Blackjax's songs sound like they were spat out. Snotty, snarly, self-consciously sloppy capriciousness anchored by 60s-styled, hard garage rock solo-flights and bratty, slurred-vocals, this stuff is classic old school. Start with the anthemic "Growing Pains," a track that would merit inclusion on any punk anthology, and kick yourself for somehow missing the boat these guys commandeered in the mid-80s. Although we love the D.I.Y. stylings of Fort Worth's Ejectors, we have to dock them several points for filling up the glossy booklet accompanying the comp with over five thousand words on the aforementioned Texas burg's punk scene. If the sounds put down by The Ejectors are any indication, Fort Worth was big into The Ramones ("Napalm Hop") and The Damned ("It's Not The Way," "Social Debate"). Tres jejune, but in a good way, helped immeasurably by humorous lyrics concerned primarily with teen rebellion, anomie and angst. (Dom Salemi)

Mustang Lightning - Texas Voodoo Surf (Mustang Lightning)

Texas psychobilly surfers' first disc in fourteen years finds them assaying a bit of this and a bit of that - the "that" including zydeco - while keeping their tongues firmly in cheek. We start off in high gear with "Jack Ball," a Link-Wray-styled barn burner, then push the pedal to the metal and are dragged kicking, while the band screams, straight

into a "Haunted House," a kitschy, creepy, rockabilly confabulation. From there on out, there's hardly a false note struck amongst the fourteen cuts. Producer Alex Chilton doesn't ladle on the special effects, preferring to let the band's horror movie aesthetics, Stoogey guitar solos, and generally all-around deranged approach to 50s and 60s rock instrumentals speak for themselves. Course as the boys are from The Lone Star State, they couldn't let things go without some slightly warped, twangy takes on country and western, and for those 'uns they do themselves proud as evidenced in "The Bull," and the Morricone classic, "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly." Still, the weirdest, and perhaps, bestest cut of all, has our Mustangs doing a distorto Big Star Brit Invasion-bit, with slightly Cockneyed vocals, dramatic breaks, and muffled la-la's in the chorus. (Dom Salemi)

The Treniers in the '50s - This Is It! (Rev-Ola)

Boasting an action-packed live show that made them the envy of other jump blues acts from the late 40s early 50s, the Treniers created a stir in some of the first rock'n'roll films where they appeared to be the only performers who knew how to have fun. Yet, despite prominent film, TV, and club work, the group scored only one r&b hit during their time at Okeh and Epic. That swingin' ditty is one of thirty songs collected on this completely satisfying retrospective.

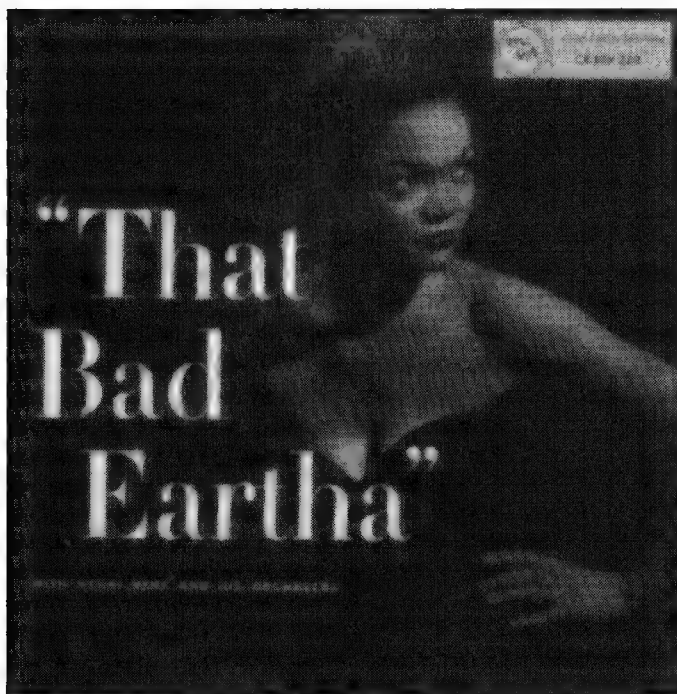
Their 1951 hit "Go! Go! Go!" typifies their sound - brothers Claude, Cliff, and Milt chanting in unison while alto sax man Don Hill solos with sass and spirit. During this pre-rock era, the Treniers set themselves apart from similar sounding groups with the liberal usage of the word "rock." Previously a black euphemism for hot sex, the Treniers helped redefine the word by using it as a metaphor for dancing and youthful good times. Subsequently, such leering ditties of the day as "It Rocks! It Rolls! It Swings!," "Rockin' On A Sunday Night," "Rockin' Is Our Business," and "(We Want a) Rock and Roll President," play out rather innocently now.

Because they were far more popular on the club circuit than many established recording acts, the Treniers never strayed far from their basic r&b shuffle roots. As a result, most of their tunes affably mine the same thematic areas. Covers of Roy Brown's "Good Rockin' Tonight," Sticks McGhee's "Drinkin' Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee," and "Bill Haley's "Rock-A-Beatin' Boogie," play out like showtime filler. Further, their belated stabs at stylistic updates with the novelties "Rock Calypso Joe" and "Oo-La-La" prove somewhat unconvincing.

Despite this sonic repetition, the always engaging

Treniers knew how to keep things lively for their fans. Indeed, hearing their versions of "Goodnight Irene" and "Sorrento" next to such teenage jive as "Cool It, Baby" and "Holy Mackerel, Andy" is sure to raise a smile. As usual, Dave Penny offers top-notch liner notes and a solid mini discography. Early rock buffs will dig this the utmost. (Ken Burke)

Eartha Kitt - "That Bad Eartha" (Rev-Ola)



Eartha Kitt's purring, seductive voice, and wicked arched-brow attitude have never been better showcased than on this reissue of her 1956 RCA sophomore album. Best remembered for spawning the erotic gold-digger's anthem "C'est Si Bon," this release cemented her reputation as an exotic, sexy vixen and purveyor of high camp.

The South Carolina-born, Harlem-raised songstress spent time as a dancer in Paris before becoming a café chanteuse. As a vocalist, Kitt put her multi-lingual abilities to good use on such tracks as "Avril Au Portugal," "Uska Dara (A Turkish Tale)," and the smoldering "Angelinos Negros." Yet her trilling vibrato worked best in English, and she sounds wistful and mysterious on such folk-flavored pop as "Lilac Wine" and "Mountain High, Valley Low."

That said, the true reasons to track this album down are for the numbers that transformed her into a showbiz icon. The French-laden single that made her career, "C'est Si Bon," still throbs with sexuality. The standards

"Let's Do It (Let's Fall in Love)" and "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," define the type of flirtatious braggadocio that made her a cabaret favorite. Best of all, the hilarious, yet provocative "I Want to Be Evil," wherein Kitt announces that she burns to shed the yoke of chastity and give in to her darker desires, even if for only a moment.

Bolstered by a nice career overview from Nicole Garcia, the disc plays out with surprising freshness and reminds us that not all the wild, distinctive voices of the 1950s emanated from rock-and-roll. There was also That Bad Eartha. (Ken Burke)

Hillbilly Casino - Three Step Wind Up (TheHillbillyCasino.com)

Wild rockabilly guitar and hyper-kinetic punk rhythms highlight this fourteen-song set by the Nashville-based Hillbilly Casino. Working entirely with original material, lead vocalist Nic Roulette, vocalist/guitarist Ronnie Crutcher, bassist Geoff Firebaugh, and drummer Andrew Dickson smartly alternate their musical approach. When operating punk mode, Roulette unleashes his gravelly scream on such fast-moving jive as the highly caffeinated "One Cup Beyond," and the hard charging "I'd Rather Be Lonely." Equally intense are such mid-60s style garage rockers as the hard charging "Broke Down," and the paranoid yet atmospheric "The Hole."

However, the disc sounds best when the group brings in shades of small combo country with Crutcher's vocal on the trucker ditty take-off "Big Dan," the Johnny Cash-inspired "You'll Have Me," and the swing-laden "Whiskey." Further, strong dollops of Stray Cats'-style rockabilly enlivens the overdrive live version of "Shoe Leather" and the incredibly catchy anthem for the Bettie Page/tattooed crowd "Spank Me." ("I'm a dirty girl... spank me.")

This is not a perfect set. Roulette's vocals occasionally work against a song's lyrics, and traditionalists may blanch at the quartet's hybrid approach. That said, Hillbilly Casino's rampant energy creates genuine excitement and danceable high-octane fun. (Ken Burke)

Sleepy LaBeef - Sleepy Rocks (Bear Family)

The "Rocks" series is one of the German Bear Family label's best notions. Recognizing that very few fans can afford their sumptuous boxed sets, they have issued these smartly compiled single disc comps which sport solid liner notes, vintage pictures, and generous track selections remastered with care.

Drawing from the early and middle portions of Sleepy LaBeef's career, this thirty-five-song compilation whets the listener's appetite for the guitar-slinger's greater body of work. Dubbed the "Human Jukebox" for his nearly six thousand-song repertoire. LaBeef remains the ultimate cover artist, a stylist who can transform any song with his hard-belting baritone. A masterful live performer, his recording career has often proven spotty. Indeed, the earliest sides for Starday and Dixie showcase an artist desperate to climb onto the Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash bandwagon with copycat re-workings of "Baby Let's Play House," "Ballad of a Teenage Queen," and "The Ways of a Woman in Love."

When left to his own devices, LaBeef was a first-rate second-generation rockabilly, cutting nifty folk-flavored ditties "I'm Through" and "Lonely." As the 50s progressed, he warmed to rockabilly with genuine verve, barreling through Bo Diddley's "Ride On Josephine," Troy Caldwell's "Turn Me Loose," and his classic remake of Hank Ballard's "Tore Up" with true r&b-fed abandon.

By the mid-60s, LaBeef refined the authoritative baritone that allowed him to transform Chuck Berry's "You Can't Catch Me," Jimmy Reed's "Shame Shame Shame," and Frogman Henry's "Ain't Got No Home" into bad-ass country jump. After Shelby Singleton began releasing discs on the Sun International imprint, he signed LaBeef to ply his trade on a long series of uptempo cover songs c. 1970 - 1979. Some of the better tracks from that era, including versions of Johnny Horton's "I'm Coming Home," Tennessee Ernie Ford's "Shotgun Boogie," and "Honky Tonk Man," conjure some of the era's best retro-redneck rock.

That said, this artist's finest work was cut with the Dave Travis band on Charly Records, and later for Rounder throughout the 80s. Artistically, these sides, augmented by Martin Hawkins' potent liner notes, don't really match up. Further, all these tracks have been released on other CDs. As such, the best that could be said about this fast-moving set is that it provides an entertaining, historically-minded introduction to one of rockabilly's best - Sleepy LaBeef. (Ken Burke)



The Rest Is Noise - Alex Ross (2007) Farrar, Straus & Giroux

If you've any interest in how classical music in the 20th Century progressed from Strauss and Mahler to the minimalism of Steve Reich, John Adams and Philip Glass, and beyond, read this book. While the descriptions of technique will confuse laymen, there's enough information here not only to keep you reading, but to have you feverishly compiling a list of composers worthy of further study.

We begin optimistically with what Ross calls the Golden Age, when classical music was popular and revolutionary. It was affected and reflected by culture, and also changed it. These were not the days when classical music has become what it is today: dismissed by the masses and, like jazz, mainly interesting to aficionados. Rather, these were the

days when *The Rite of Spring* led to riots. Such mayhem is almost unthinkable today, unless we're talking about deadly incendiary devices recklessly employed by washed-up rock bands.

The influence of classical music may be seen most notably in Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus*. Various forms of expression were crossing over, much as they do today, as styles of music blended into experimental collages eventually transmogrifying into totally new genres.

Most interesting are the chapters dealing with the effects of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War on classical music. Regarding the first World War, Ross notes that Thomas Mann had written, "War! We felt purified, liberated, we felt an enormous hope." Classical musicians fell prey to the same sentiment. Schoenberg wished to "worship the German God." Strauss, on the other hand, opposed the war.

World War II presented even greater contrasts. Shostakovich lent his patriotism to the Soviet Union. Later, Stalin and others would try their best to manipulate composers, sometimes failing and other times succeeding. Nazism provided an even starker contrast between composers. It's shocking enough to read that Josef Mengele "whistled favorite airs as he selected victims for the gas chambers." Strauss, meanwhile, found his German heart stirred: "Thank God, finally a Reich Chancellor [Hitler] who is interested in art." But, of course, music played a more sinister part in Nazi propaganda. Wagner, as most know, was Hitler's favorite composer, and the former's love for the latter was obviously related to Wagner's anti-Semitism. All of this led to the deaths of many would-be great composers who had the misfortune to be born Jewish.

The Cold War added a more subtle and little-known note to the use of music as propaganda. Who would have guessed that the CIA-sponsored, avant-garde festivals would serve as a way of challenging oppression in the Soviet Union? Later, the CIA and FBI would attempt "purges of homosexuals [many of the era's composers were gay] on the theory that they made easy targets for Soviet 'blackmail.'" The ever-complex Cold War provided the means for, and end of, classical music's direct influence on culture.

The Rest is Noise pursues classical music into its most experimental phase, with Cage producing silent compositions and Stockhausen pursuing electronic technology with a piece entitled "Friday," which demanded "rockets flying, a woman in the moon, a giant syringe moving towards a woman, a huge pencil sharpener about four meters high as a woman, and a man who is a pencil pushing himself into the pencil sharpener, and an enormous male raven flying around a woman's nest."

Experimentation had seemingly reached its limits. How could composers move forward?

The minimalists provided the first answer: "... the pleasure of a steady pulse, devising a modern tonality that had nothing nostalgic about it."

Ross ends his book by predicting an optimistic future for classical music, even if it has drifted away from the more formal constraints of the genre. He notes the cross-breeding of pop music and classical music by such artists as Bjork, while also adding the influence of jazz, rap and other popular post-WW II musical genres.

J.G. Ballard Quotes - eds. V. Vale and Mike Ryan (2004) Re/Search

A better title might be *The Tao of Ballard* for this brilliantly assembled collection of quotations from the man who dug out the electric roots of the modern age, pulled them up, and planted the most astonishing gardens in novels like *The Day of Creation*, *The Crystal World*, and his best-known work, *Crash*. Yet what makes Ballard so fascinating is that his interviews and essays rarely concern writing itself. About the only thing he ever mentions in this regard, is his predilection for a bit of scotch before hitting the word processor. Otherwise, he discusses what motivates his writing: his perceptions. Those perceptions seem to stream to the surface of some deep well. And with this volume in hand, you can take a drink any time you need it.

Indeed, V. Vale states in his introduction that the book was "especially aimed at all who have to work for a living. It is our hope that many a commute may be mollified by this quotations book, which is easy to carry and use – just one minute at a bus stop may yield an inspiration sufficient to set one's imagination reeling."

Let's test that idea. I will now flip randomly through the pages and select one quotation. Give me a moment. Thanks. Here we go: "The old dreams were dead, Manson and Mickey Mouse and Marilyn Monroe belonged to a past America. It was time for new dreams, worthy of a real tomorrow." [From *Hello America*.]

Quintessential Ballard, there, his aim to replace dead myths with ones suited for our age. His fascinations have never been the stuff of science-fiction, exactly, but nearly real-time extrapolations from, or reinterpretations of, the reality in which we now live. His novels and stories could be utilized as self-help tools for how to survive another drive-down strip-mall hell, which will soon cover all of America and then the world. He not only takes such changes to extremes, but in doing so makes the reader understand how he or she can do the same. Powerless in any political sense, nothing can destroy the power of our

imaginings, and nothing can destroy our inner dialogue, except death.

Here's another: "The roots of shamanism and levitation, and the erotic cathexis of flight – can one see them as an attempt to escape from time?" [From *Memories of the Space Age*. Highly recommended.] Time is another Ballard preoccupation. In *The Crystal World*, time literally melts into a strange, godless eternity, to which his characters willingly submerge them.

All of these quotations will enhance your ability to see the world anew. Few minds can challenge Ballard's when it comes to the almost non-reality in which we live, and what exactly we can do with and in it. (Paul A. Toth)

Still Life with Psychotic Squirrel C.B. Smith (2007) Six Gallery Press

Here's one of those novels that has me longing for a terrorist strike on Publisher's Row. There's not a chance in hell this thing would ever make it past the first committee meeting, and that's exactly the hope it offers the reader. It's something of a fictional diary and journal, but not, thank Christ, another memoir. It's experimental, yet accessibly so. Short and less short entries record the narrator's perceptions.

Those perceptions seem influenced by the writings of Lautréamont and other poets and stylists of his ilk. Some notices mention William S. Burroughs, but I see something else happening here, less a writing towards silence (Burroughs' great hope being "rubbing out the word") than a splintering of narrative and time. And there is a sense of scatter, the scatter of life, the scattering array of it, and the way our lives scatter away from our intentions.

Chapter titles provide hints of Smith's range: "Reflections on Kitchenware, et al."; "The Ghosts of Christmas Present"; and my favorite, ">Caring," which consists of the words "I don't care" repeated for pages, followed by "I care too much." And I cannot neglect "The Psychotic Squirrel," the narrator's nemesis, though one he reluctantly respects: "And aren't they cute these seemingly angelic kin of the rodent whose sharp teeth and finally honed instincts can turn them into a lethal attacker."

Here's the narrator's wonderful early experience with dentists: "It seemed strange to me that all those dentists were in one room like that. When I watched dentists on TV, they always had rooms all to themselves. I asked Mom about it. 'Well honey,' she said, 'because that building you go to is a school. A dental school. That's where they learn how to be dentists.'" Thanks, Ma! Memories of barbershop schools reverberate underneath

my current haircut that is only an improvement because it's falling out.

Still Life with Psychotic Squirrel is a book of wanderings. At times, it reminds me of Jim Thompson's writing, and that, in turn, reminds me of the Rodney Dangerfield line, "I can't get no respect." But these days, that's a compliment. It is almost as if being allowed a space on the Barnes and Noble new fiction releases shelves is an insult: "You write like Stevie Wonder sees. Welcome aboard."

Les Chants de Maldoror - Comte de Lautreamont (1868) Exact Change

This is one of the most revolting, perverse and well-written novels I've read in quite some time. If Satan does not exist, and I doubt he does, it would be necessary to invent him - if only for Maldoror's sake. Whether one of the Dark One's minions, or a wayward "soul" with the combined brains of a cockroach, fly, and human being, our protagonist, if such a word applies, struggles with the sickness of existence. He swerves wildly between empathy with the human condition, and a murderous desire to ruin it still further.

Like Beckett, one comes to Lautreamont not for the story but the dizzying quality of the writing. I had a difficult time imagining how he conjured even one sentence. I also could not dissect the parallel satire of romanticism and philosophy mentioned in the introduction and end notes; but then again, I'm no literary critic, and this is a book, not a frog. Nevertheless, Maldoror would have been as pleased to see the book in the form of a frog, pig or hurricane.

Estranged from humankind, yet unable to unleash himself from it, Maldoror occasionally engages with his enemies and would-be allies. "I sought a soul that might resemble mine, and I could not find it. I scanned all the crannies of the earth: my perseverance was useless. I could not remain alone. There had to be someone who would approve of my character; there had to be someone with the same ideas as myself." Maldoror is trapped, and it is this entrapment that seemingly leads him ever further into his spiraling dreamworld.

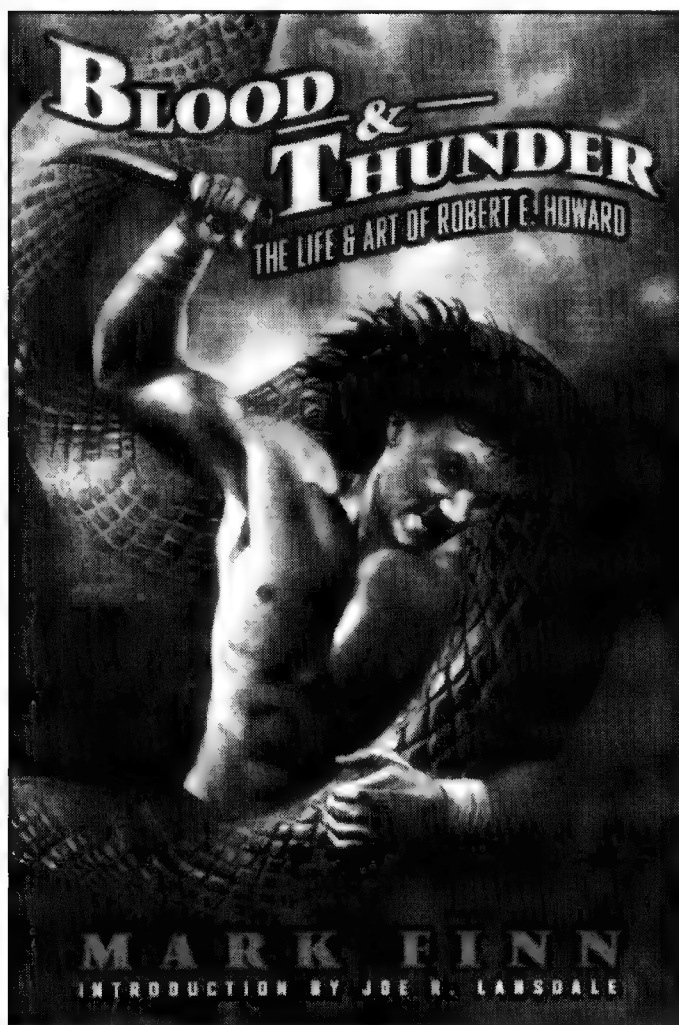
Dreamworld it is because almost everything undergoes transmutation, and never to its benefit. "The elephant lets itself be stroked, but not the tick. Beware if your hand be hairy - or simply made of flesh and bone. Your fingers would be finished. They'd crack as if put to the torture. The skin would disappear as if by strange magic. Lice are incapable of wreaking as much ill as their imaginations contemplate. If you find a louse in your way, be off, and

do not lick the papillae of the tongue. You would meet with an accident. That has been known.”

Maldoror is a character that is at turns deceitful, hateful, hallucinatory and, on occasion, almost loving. He is the criminal we refuse to admit is human even as he reveals a part of humanity we prefer to reject. But this is not *Chicken Soup for the Demonic*. Nor is it a life lesson. Rather, it's a warning, best put by Maldoror: “The body is a breathing corpse.”

Blood & Thunder: The Life & Art of Robert E. Howard - Mark Finn (2006) Monkeybrain

As far as writers go, Robert E. Howard is far from a household name. Mention of his name conjures images of a musclebound Arnold Schwarzenegger wearing a loincloth and wielding a big sword as Conan the Barbarian, or perhaps the gloriously evocative paintings of that same barbarian by Frank Frazetta. Dig a little deeper, and you might find a few vague references to a crazy Texas writer who killed himself when his mother died.



While those are certainly elements of Howard's legacy, to consider that the whole summation of the man's life and works is a gross injustice. Mark Finn attempts in *Blood & Thunder: The Life & Art of Robert E. Howard* to set the record straight on Howard and the perceived errors propagated by the late L. Sprague de Camp in *The Miscast Barbarian: A Biography of Robert E. Howard*. While de Camp was a fine writer and well-intentioned - almost single-handedly saving Howard from oblivion by promoting reprints and completing Conan fragments Howard had left unfinished at the time of his death - his experience as an urbane, East Coast intellectual was just about as diametrically opposed to Howard's as possible. Because of that basic disconnect, in Finn's view, de Camp misinterpreted a great deal of Howard's life and ultimately presented a distorted picture of the man, which Finn attempts to redress.

Finn, to his credit, does a convincing job painting a vivid picture of early 20th Century boomtown Texas. In a land barely tamed, with Comanche raids still a living memory for many and oil just beginning its decades-long rein as king of The Lone Star State, Howard had a challenging childhood. His father, Isaac, an opportunist frontier doctor, moved the family often, and Howard was never able to establish lasting friendships until they finally settled in Cross Plains. His mother, Hester, was as possessive as she was domineering, and over the years as Isaac would be gone for long periods of time, the marriage broke down and Hester worked to bring the young Robert to “her side” in the marital conflict. As Howard grew into an adult, his mother worked to keep the apron strings tied tightly, intercepting and deflecting interest from the local girls and women effectively - only schoolteacher and aspiring writer Novelyn Price managed to penetrate Hester's defenses and become Howard's girlfriend, if only for a while. Under these conditions, it's a wonder that Howard wrote anything at all, let alone become one of the leading pulp writers of the 1930s.

Finn does a thorough job of exploring Howard's life and passions - from his unlikely friendship with legendary horror writer H.P. Lovecraft, to his love of boxing - giving the reader a real person with whom to identify as opposed to a cipher. While Howard is best known for Conan, his range of output was truly breathtaking - fantasy, horror, westerns, humor, mysteries, historical fiction, and even poetry. Boxing stories were a particular favorite of his, and for the years just before and after the start of the Great Depression, his work was in such high demand that magazines tried to hire him away from each other for exclusive series. In his time, Howard was a literary force to be reckoned with, and became quintessential Texas writer - all before his suicide at age thirty.

For anyone who thought they knew who Robert E. Howard was, doesn't know who Robert E. Howard was, or simply has an appreciation for the finest of the American pulp tradition, this book is a must. (Jayme Lynn Blaschke)

Behold the Man - Michael Moorcock (2006) Overlook

Sometimes great writers affirm their brilliance not with epic narratives or dazzling prose, but rather with the simplest of things. Simple, such as a plot or situation so obvious and natural - yet heretofore unwritten-that the reader sits back dumbstruck, wondering, "Why didn't I think of that?"

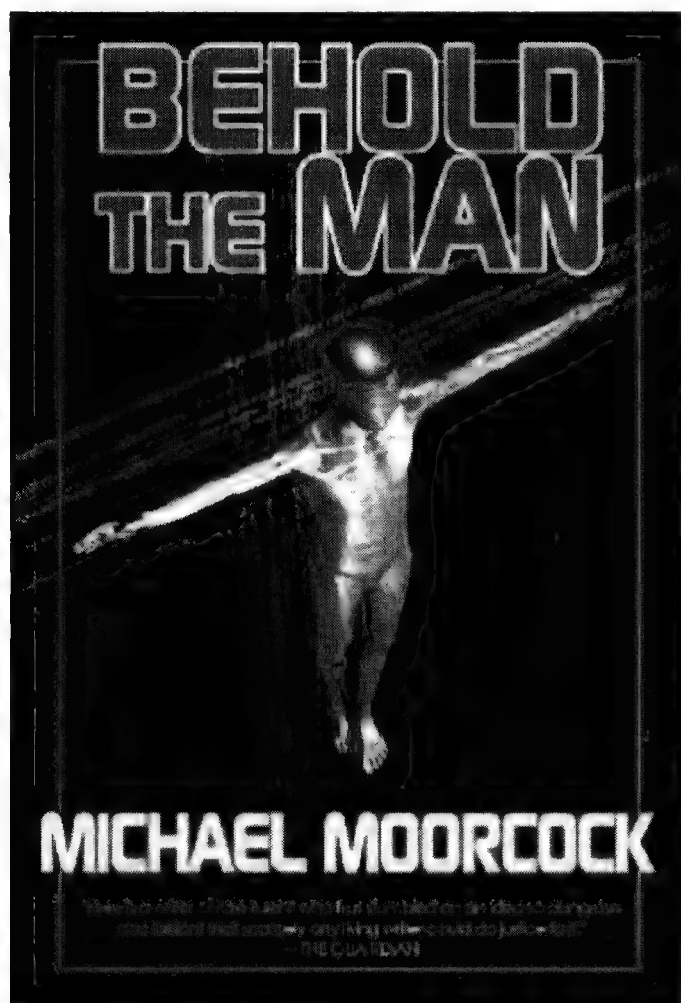
Michael Moorcock's landmark *Behold the Man* is just such a book. Originally published as a novella in the pages of *New Worlds* in 1966, it was subsequently revised and expanded for publication as a novel in 1970, and has remained in print - with a few short interludes here and there - ever since. The premise, as mentioned above, is shockingly simple and straightforward: a man from modern times, Karl Glogauer, steals a time machine and

travels back in time in order to meet Jesus Christ. What he finds waiting for him defies more than two thousand years of Christian tradition.

The science fiction elements play an almost negligible role. Time machine delivers Glogauer, time machine exits, stage left. From there on out, it's Glogauer's show and his alone, no religious fanatic, but rather a jaded student of history searching for something to believe in. His initial encounter with John the Baptist, an apocalyptic Jewish revolutionary, is at once unnerving and reassuring. Glogauer's attempts to learn the whereabouts of Jesus Christ, however, lead to a confused series of escalating misunderstandings, and the false belief that Glogauer himself was a Nazarean returning from exile in Egypt. As he persists with his search for Jesus, his mental stability steadily erodes as he falls deeper into the revolutionary fervor gripping the land of Israel. Eventually, he begins to assert his own influence over the course of history.

It's hard for modern readers to understand the impact of this book when it first appeared nearly forty years ago. There had been no conspiracy-fueled *DaVinci Code* on the bestseller lists, no *Life of Brian* or *Last Temptation of Christ* in theaters. The deconstruction of religious icons was simply not a task undertaken by those wishing to avoid controversy. Moorcock, however, at the forefront of science fiction's New Wave movement, was far less concerned with controversy or offense as he was with exploring ideas and pushing literature in new directions. But without *Behold the Man*, it's arguable that none of those other works would exist today.

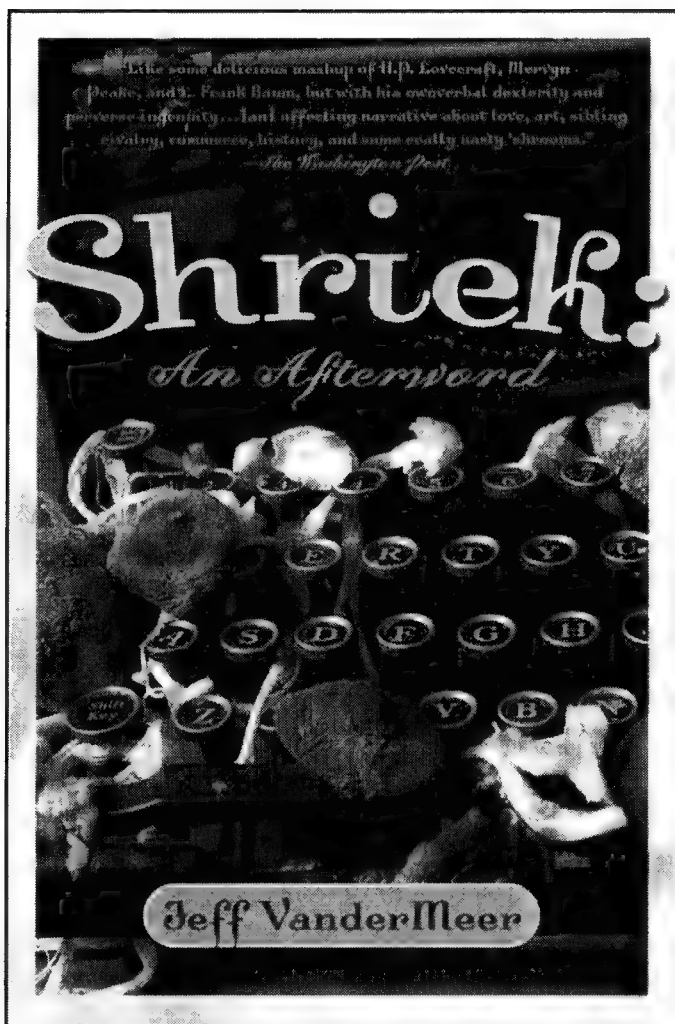
Moorcock, a prolific writer by nature, produced his share of mediocre work over the years. *Behold the Man* isn't one of them. A lean book, *Behold the Man* is one of Moorcock's more accessible works, straightforward and direct in its presentation of such weighty subject matter. It holds up exceptionally well, and rather than a full-frontal attack on Christianity, Moorcock ultimately casts the story as a philosophical exercise examining the very nature of belief. (Jayme Lynn Blaschke)



Shriek: An Afterword by Jeff VanderMeer (2006) Tor

Jeff VanderMeer built his reputation as a writer of literary fantasy - his stories, as a rule, boast a meticulous attention to word choice in addition to a ruthless creativity that's more than a little off-kilter. His work tends toward the challenging and complex, for all the fun he has in turning speculative fiction tropes on their collective ears. In *Shriek: An Afterword*, VanderMeer does nothing to dispel that reputation.

The premise of *Shriek* is straightforward enough.



Janice Shriek, a one-time mover and shaker among the artistic community of the fictional city of Ambergris, has been hired to write an afterword to *The Hoegbotton Guide to the Early History of Ambergris*, a tome authored by her missing (and presumed dead) brother Duncan Shriek. What ensues is a feat of literary derring-do that defies easy description. *Shriek* isn't merely a narrative chronicling the writing of the afterword. Instead, it is the afterword itself, written by Janice Shriek in first person. To push the envelope further, it's actually the first draft of the afterword, with Duncan's notes, edits and commentary interspersed amongst his sister's ramblings. The end result is an improbably fascinating back-and-forth dialogue between the two siblings that covers far more ground, and is far more revealing, than any mere afterword.

Ambergris is, for the uninitiated, a strange, conflicted place built upon the ruins of a city once inhabited by the grey caps - a fungal life form that are essentially mushroom men. Only these mushroom men have teeth, and strange, inscrutable technologies that can literally alter the reality of any human unfortunate enough to come under their sway. Since the destruction of their original city, the grey caps have maintained a keen interest in

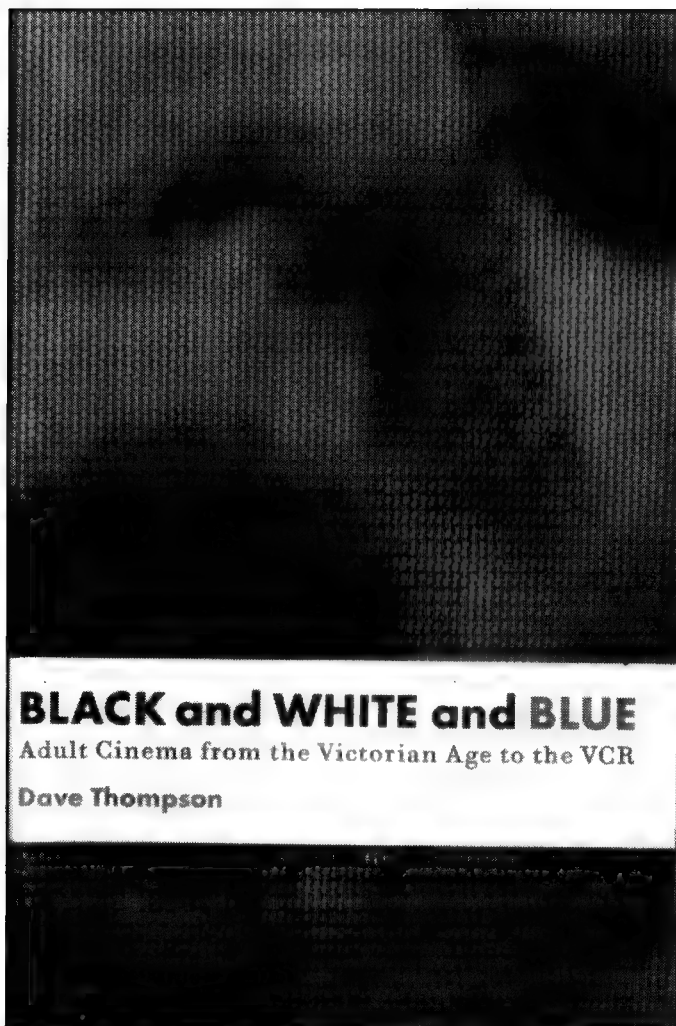
Ambergris, and continue to live close by in the limitless warren of passages and caverns beneath that city. It is this subterranean world Duncan Shriek becomes obsessed with exploring, and over time, his explorations physically change him into something not quite human as he picks up a wide range of bizarre fungal infections. This Janice chronicles faithfully-albeit not impartially-weighing in heavily on Duncan's ill-fated romance with a student during his stint as a professor at the city's religious university. The student-Mary Sabon-later devotes her career to debunking and destroying what little reputation Duncan had built for himself, a tension that colors the subtext of nearly the entire book.

Ultimately, *Shriek* is a clever, ambitious collection of character studies - of Duncan and Janice, certainly, but also of Mary Sabon and even the city of Ambergris itself. As a novel it won't appeal to everyone. It's a somber and often brooding work that can be dense at times, but the surreal beauty of the prose and invented world reward the persistent reader. There are echoes of Samuel R. Delany here - pre-*Dhalgren*, that is, when Delany's writing was still accessible-and VanderMeer acquits himself well. VanderMeer has written in the world of Ambergris before, in his short story collection *City of Saints and Madmen*, and has more forthcoming work set in that strangest of cities. Readers may never get a clear picture of what exactly is going on in that troubled land, but as long as VanderMeer keeps rationing out such intricate puzzle pieces, it's doubtful he'll want for readers. (Jayme Lynn Blaschke)

Black and White and Blue: Adult Cinema from the Victorian Age to the VCR - Dave Thompson (2007) ECW Press

In which an attempt is made to trace the hundred-plus year development of the naughty film, from the first primitive kinetoscope images to today's "work" on the internet. Brought to you by Dave Thompson, one of the world's foremost and prolific music journalists, author of over one hundred books whose subjects range from Finnish philately to the Velvet Underground. So you know this guy is an intellectual. Lucky for him, he's a fine writer because what he's taking on here is a subgenre of erotic cinema, namely, the stag film, which doesn't really have a history or development you can trace.

Think about it: you're talking about those grainy, two to ten minute 8- or 16mm films made in backrooms with the car's motor running. For the most part, it was the work of a few moments and so we're talking about



tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of works made in every corner of the globe. How the hell are you supposed to fashion a history out of that? Even *Plaboy* in 1967 opined that "Although everybody knows about stag films, nobody knows very much about stag films." Thompson admits that the precise chronology of what he calls "the commercial hardcore erotic film" will never be pinned down.

So, to write a history about that which is too diverse and disconnected to have a history, you have to, not to put too fine a point on it, make it up. And to make it believable as well as interesting, you have to be more than a decent writer, which we already noted Thompson may lay claim to being. Also delusional, because what you have with these films is a numbing sameness, that is to say, no plot, no acting, no scenery, no imagination. Just non-descript people fucking and sucking without restraint. Thompson, God bless him, doesn't see it that way. For him, when the flesh is willing and the camera and lighting are properly aligned, "a great stag movie is better than sexual perfection." That's a direct quote, and if that isn't proof positive that the author walks in a reality with which you and I are unfamiliar, I'll eat my MAC.

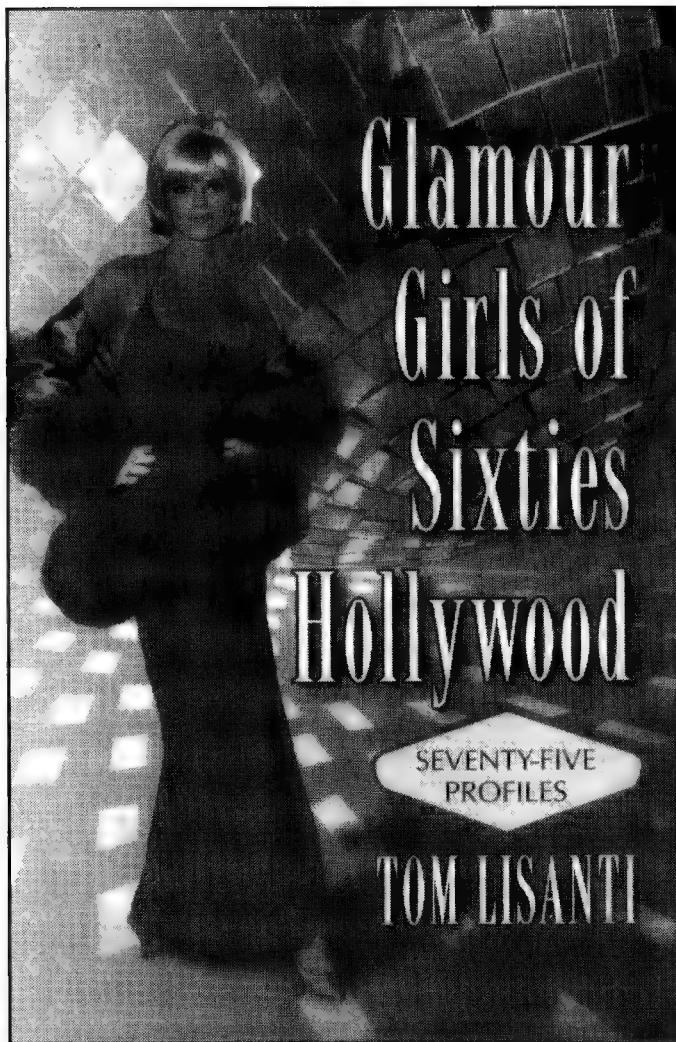
To be charitable, there are exceptions to every rule, and Thompson does manage to run down and highlight the few dozen stags that entertain, either with their ineptitude or outrageousness. In comparing and contrasting these seminal works, we are given the illusion of chronology and evolution. We just have to ignore the fact that a film made in France in 1908 is being compared and contrasted with an American color stag feature of the late 50s. Just shut your eyes and clap your cloven hoofs together and say with Thompson, "I do believe, I do believe. I do. I do. I do."

Even with such willing suspension of disbelief, *Black and White and Blue* would hardly merit its two-hundred-fifty-nine pages, but Thompson fleshes out his narrative, such as it is, with interviews with genre veterans to give the reader a down-and-dirty look at this most exploitive of film genres. Real history, in the form of quick and imaginative sketches of the cultural developments in the countries where porn was allowed to flourish, also provides an air of verisimilitude. Loosely translated, this means England and America, but we do get to drop into Weimar Germany, Mexico, Sweden and half a dozen other countries along the sordid way. While we're never quite convinced that there is a story here, we're never bored, and with fiction, that's all that really matters.

Glamour Girls of Sixties Hollywood Tom Lisanti (2007) McFarland

An homage to those hot young things, aspiring actresses all, taking the only route open to them in 60s Hollywood; that is to say, as backdrops, lithesome, hesitantly articulate, barely clothed props in cheesy films and campy television programs. The girls fueling our adolescent dreams while Adam West and Elvis and Dean Martin pretended not to notice. At least not too much. No, we're not talking about unearthly beauties like Julie Newmar or Stephanie Powers; although largely forgotten today, they were stars in their time. These were the decorative props, the pin-up girls who had you looking past Annette Funicello and Nancy Sinatra, scratching your head and wondering just what the hell they did to get pushed into the back of the soundstage. And why, given their beauty and stage presence, they put up with such insults, why they were willing to be relegated to the background in third-rate productions.

Well, in these seventy-five profiles, presented courtesy of one Tom Lisanti, who seemingly has made a career of pondering questions such as these - cf *Drive-In Dream Girls*, *Fantasy Femmes of Sixties Cinema* - gives us the scoop and the poop as to why so many of these curvaceous cuties put up with such nonsense. Surprisingly, it had



little to do with lack of ability. Many of these women - Lee Meredith, Yvonne Craig, Carol Wayne, and Inga Nielsen, to name just a few - possessed more than a modicum of talent. True, many of these women came from the modeling world, or direct from the pages of girly shows and magazines. Times were different then, you didn't just jump from the chorus line to the Hollywood soundstage, you had to have a little something going for you. This meant that if you hung in there, despite your relative lack of big-time success, you could end up with a fairly long and interesting career in showbiz, leaving you with a lot of stories to tell. And for the ones still willing to talk, Lisanti has many mean streets he's willing to walk with his "girls."

Here's Melodie Johnson (you may remember her bathtub scene with Clint Eastwood in *Coogan's Bluff*):

You needed the drive to become a star like like Raquel Welch. She had the cojones and that's what it takes. [That's why] I refused to straddle an oversized rocket in a Universal Studio publicity shoot . . . Eddy Williams, she

leaps on it - wraps her legs around the sides straddling away. I watched Eddy and thought, "You know, you're just not going to make it in the movies, Melodie."

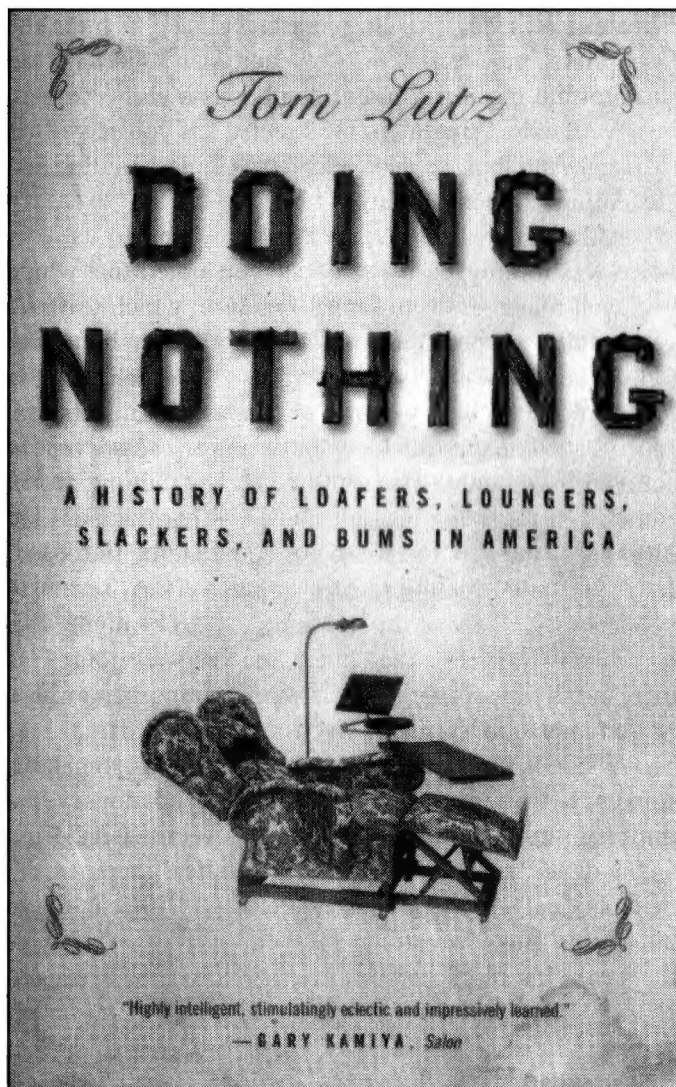
And whether or not the lovelies are talking, the author introduces all and sundry with a career highlight that gets you immediately involved, follows that with "Groovy '60s Credits," proceeds from there with a short background bio, and then finishes with a "70s and Beyond" coda. It's endlessly fascinating, for far too many reasons to go into here; just know that you can open to any page, and find yourself getting lost in facts and stories and references that will have you jumping to the index and other entries and back to the index again. That is, if the glossy-now-turned-grainy publicity photos don't put you in stun mode, resulting in a revisiting of your dreamy little pubescent dreams.

Doing Nothing - Tom Lutz (2007) Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Man is born free but everywhere is in chains. You don't have to be Rousseau to know that. You do have to be wealthy, however, not to care. Most of us are never going to be rich, no matter how hard we try, or how brilliant and/or inventive we might be. We're going to be bound to our phoney-baloney 9-5 jobs, jobs which fail to inspire and enrich, wherein we are asked to sit, doing nothing of any consequence, waiting, just quietly patiently waiting until we are asked to leave. Or are dead.

Thus, it is. Thus, it has always been. Save for the clever ones. The loafers, the loungers, the slackers. Those who know that living well is the best revenge. And know gobs of cash are not needed to accomplish this. This book is for them. It is a celebration of passive resistance against the rich and the powerful and the entitled. So it is for you, dear reader, my brother, my hypocrite-double.

Doing Nothing's principal focus is on the history of Anglo-American loafing, with the occasional digression to Europe and such faraway places as Japan. From Dr. Johnson and his Idler to the Beats and their *bodhissatvas*, to Generation X, it all makes for fascinating reading. What makes it fascinating, intellectually stimulating reading, though, is Lutz's manful attempts to show that loafers and workaholics are both cut from the same cloth. We begin with Benjamin Franklin setting the standard for hard work and industriousness with his Poor Richard and his maxims. This despite living a life John Adams described as a "scene of continual dissipation." Over in England, we have the aforementioned Johnson telling everyone and sundry that "the only value of work is to enable leisure,



and the highest calling is to do as little as possible.” This from the man who gave us both *The Lives of the English Poets* and the first *English Dictionary*.

The evidence seemingly becomes overwhelming, and by the time we get to Bertrand Russell - “I think there is far too much work done in the world” - and his collected thirty-four volumes of work, we’re almost convinced. Almost.

So why aren’t we ordinary mortals convinced? Well, first of all we’re talking about men (and women) of genius, and with intellectual giants, the rules that apply to you and me do not apply to them. They are not human. Mozart may have lived a dissolute life, but he wrote his first opera at twelve - try to wrap your mind around that - and went on to compose hundreds of works, most of them pretty good, before dying. To quote the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*:

The extent and range of Mozart’s genius are so vast and so bewildering that any concise summing up of his achievement must risk being trite.

Keats wrote the “Ode on Indolence,” but despite being described by one wag as an “idle, loafing fellow”; he was constantly “writing poetry.” Poetry the equal of any in English literature. The same goes for Wordsworth, although often, by his own admission, “wandering lonely as a cloud.” Or to take a present day example, Charles Bukowski, who spent much of his life drunk and hungover, yet still managed to produce dozens of books of poetry and fiction. All of it still in print.

Which brings me to my second point. We’re not really talking about “work,” here, are we? Not the kind Marx was thinking of when he was developing his theory of alienation of labor, right? We’re talking about the type of paid-for endeavors which are mentally and morally injurious to man. The activities performed during the day, away from home, which have little, if any connection to one’s life.

When an activity brings pleasure, or is performed because it is psychologically and emotionally necessary to one’s sense of self, then it’s not “work”; it’s “creativity,” that which gives one’s existence meaning. This is the secret at the heart of *Doing Nothing* and one which Lutz guiltily wrestles with throughout. He shouldn’t have to, but he’s had the Protestant work ethic hammered into his head from childhood as we all have, and so, he just can’t admit that doing little or no work can be a creative activity in and of itself, a way to living well and getting revenge on a society hell-bent on making the majority of its citizens labor at soul-destroying jobs. So Lutz points to those who have produced the best that has been thought and said to flesh out his theory, refusing to acknowledge the common, everyday, garden-variety slacker, or equating them with the comic figures in movies and television, e.g., Maynard G. Krebs, Charlie Chaplin, etc. Or he poeticizes, apostrophizing slack as the yang at odds with our working yin. Or makes the loafer a poet maudit, mourning the loss of purpose in life, of heroism, of the aristocratic ease that should be theirs. Anything but admit that the typical loafer is an ordinary man who has figured out what he likes doing and spends most of his energy trying to do what he likes, and avoid doing what he does not. The truly creative loafer raises this strategy to an art form, turning the job at which he’s forced to work, into a form of continuous play, i.e., avoidance of the activities for which he is ostensibly being paid. Think of those guys in *Clerks*, or the gal writing her poems with the headphones on at the used record shop

Lutz knows this; hell, the book had its genesis in the conflicting emotions of ire and admiration aroused watching his son spend almost a year on the couch watching television before heading off to college. Ah, the sins of the father, eh, Mr. Lutz: you spent your early

twenties riding the rails and hitchhiking in emulation of Kerouac, did you not? The slacker ethic is strong within you and we, this glorious band of bum brothers, know that despite your guilt and misgivings, only one of our tribe could have written a book so sympathetic to our cause.

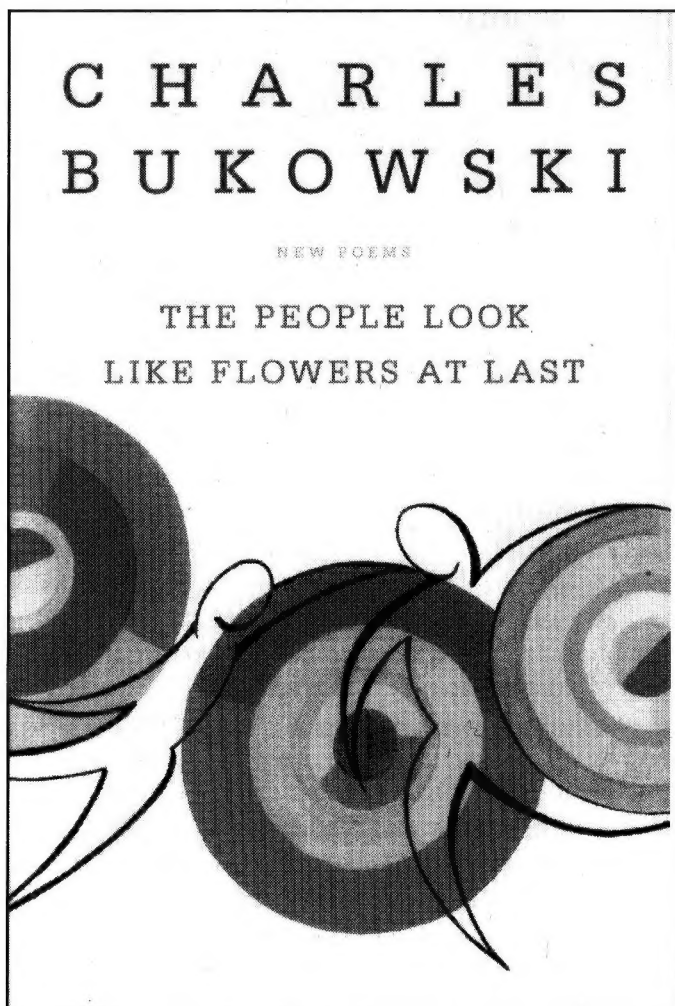
The People Look Like Flowers At Last - Charles Bukowski (2007) Ecco

They never really did. The people. Bukowski was never really comfortable with them. Not the few friends he had. Certainly not his parents. Or those met at the racetrack, the place where even more than the bars, he felt truly at home. I mean, wasn't it Buke who once said that he didn't like people, he just felt better when they weren't around? So you don't get a sense of misanthropy in the poetry, nor the sense of wanting to desperately belong or to fit in. Bukowski was through with all that. If it can be said he ever engaged the world in that way. No, it was a kind of wistfulness, of gentle melancholy over the madness that seemed to permeate the world, and the fact that people weren't working, even in their spare or idle time, to make it or themselves better. Yet, he's not a

defeatest; he's not a cynic preparing a face to meet the faces that he meets. Though "each man's life [is] too short to find meaning; and all the books a waste"; there is, nevertheless "singing in the streets." If you're willing to listen. And look, there is old Harry Chinaski sitting and "listen[ing] to them singing."

So he listened, and while he didn't sing to us - his voice was too ragged for that - he celebrated that which was well made and scorned the modern, which to Buke was a rudely shaped thing, all out of sorts from bottom to top. When he wasn't celebrating wine, women, and the immortals, Hank went deep inside himself for inspiration. Like Yeats, content to follow to its source every event in action or in thought. He measured the lot, but the poetry came from forgiving himself the lot. That made all the difference, and kept the work from descending into banal self-confession, histrionic mea culpas. Thus, seriously pondering while shaving, "what the razor might do," comes the knowledge that "the game keeps us going," as there is "always some new Carmen waiting somewhere just around some corner."

A valedictory for having come through, somehow, someway. There are the usual preoccupations - the impossibility of women, love's short, sweet season, drink as anodyne, beauty making itself manifest amongst the metaphorical and literal mean streets - still, we can't help but notice Buke wrestling with mortality, the value of the work, his place in posterity. Yeah, Time's winged chariot draws near, and it gives Hank, and the reader, pause; the beauty of all of these last bits though, is that Bukowski allows us to hear the soft, sad lilting sounds of that conveyance, stopping for a moment between death and immortality. (Dom Salemi)



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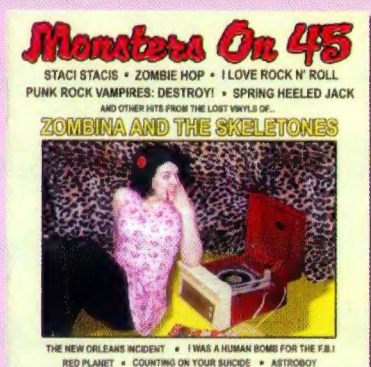
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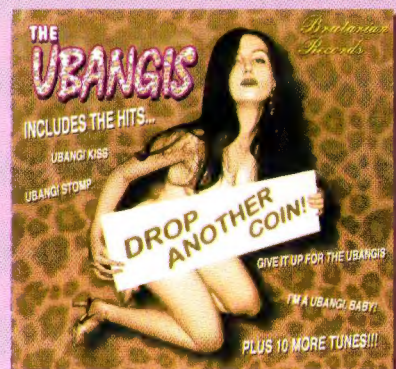
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